

Florida Center for Reading Research

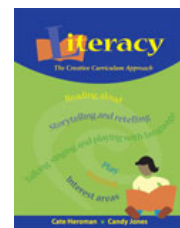
Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach

What is Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach?

Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach is a supplement to *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*, which is intended to be a comprehensive preschool program for children ages three to five years. The Creative Curriculum has been available for 13 years, providing teachers the theoretical foundation and the framework of the curriculum's content. In 2004, the scope was broadened to include a literacy volume, *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach*. The focus of this new volume is on helping early childhood educators develop a better understanding of the key components of a comprehensive literacy program, the research behind each component, and the instructional role of the teacher. Teachers learn how to integrate language and literacy experiences in specified interest areas as well as in other planned activities throughout the day. This volume also outlines what the authors describe as seven essential teaching strategies teachers use during large-group and small-group times, as well as with individual children. The literacy supplement is designed to be used with *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*, but the method and content for intentionally teaching specific literacy skills is applicable to other programs. To be effective in the classroom, teachers and aides may need ongoing professional development to acquire the language responses needed to implement the program and to better understand how to scaffold children's learning.

The Creative Curriculum describes how to organize a preschool classroom so that the environment is structured around 11 interest areas or centers: Blocks, Dramatic Play, Toys and Games, Art, Library, Discovery, Sand and Water, Music and Movement, Cooking, Computers, and Outdoors. Within this structure, teachers organize child-initiated and teacher-directed learning experiences that are intended to address four developmental areas of learning: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language as well as six content areas: literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology. Through experiences with materials in the different centers, verbal interactions with peers, and scaffolded instruction with adults, the child is expected to learn and develop in all areas. This report focuses on the area of literacy although the full Creative Curriculum program has more complexity and addresses other areas of content and skills (e.g., math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology).

Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach builds on the "whole child" philosophy of *The Creative Curriculum* by describing how literacy activities, related research, and teacher's role support the child's early literacy and language development. Extensive training is intended to help teachers learn the developmental stages of play in each interest area to know how to incorporate literacy experiences. Instead of a specific scope and sequence of activities, teachers observe children's progress using the 13 literacy objectives from *The Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5* (an assessment tool) and their knowledge of the specific components of literacy learning to plan experiences intended to promote literacy one-on-one, in small groups, or with the whole class. A lesson may involve a specific activity or be an opportunity within one of the interest areas for the teacher to engage a child or a group of children in a conversation to promote their language and thinking skills or learn new vocabulary. For each one of the literacy activities, there are strategies to extend the activity and to accommodate both children with special needs and children who are English language learners. For



activities that focus on the 13 developmental objectives and the components of literacy, teachers can refer to a list of literacy activities in the back of the Literacy volume or go to CreativeCurriculum.net, if their school subscribes to the web-based assessment system. Literacy goals within *The Creative Curriculum* consist of seven components: Literacy as a source of enjoyment, Vocabulary and language, Phonological awareness, Knowledge of print, Letters and words, Comprehension, and Books and other texts. This report will focus on how *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach* develops the components critical to the development of early language and pre-reading skills: oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge.

The assessment plan relies on the teacher's documented observations and samples of children's work collected over a period of time to record the child's progress. Once the teachers analyze this information, they use it to evaluate children on the 13 literacy objectives listed in *The Creative Curriculum's* Developmental Continuum Assessment System. Each objective has three steps outlining the progression of development in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. An additional level, called "Forerunners", is included to address children who have developmental delays or who have not been exposed to learning opportunities in this area. To illustrate, one objective is, "Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet," and each of the levels are described as, Forerunner, "Participates in songs and finger plays about letters"; Step I, "Recognizes and identifies a few letters by name"; Step II, "Recognizes and names many letters"; and Step III, "Begins to make letter-sound connections." The program recommends that teachers use the results of this formative assessment to evaluate the child's progress in the context of the curriculum, plan instructional experiences, and communicate with parents. This process is facilitated for teachers who subscribe to the web-based assessment system for *The Creative Curriculum*. CreativeCurriculum.net helps teachers group children based on assessment data and recommends appropriate activities. Additional assessment forms are provided in the Appendix for teachers to document children's progress in the areas of Alphabet Knowledge, Print and Book Concepts, and Phonological Awareness. The program does not provide specific recommendations on how teachers can use the results of its assessments to modify instruction or provide a valid and reliable method to screen and monitor progress in the critical areas of pre-literacy development.

How is Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach aligned with Current Reading Research?

In *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach*, teachers introduce literacy skills such as oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge during planned small-group and whole-group activities. They use a list of basic materials and book suggestions for each interest area to create activities for children to practice and apply these skills. There is no specified plan for daily instruction or sequence of activities that follow a hierarchy of skill development in each of these areas. Teachers must rely on assessment data to determine the right activity for the right child or group of children. Furthermore, the sample "teacher's weekly planning forms" demonstrate how to specify materials and activities throughout the day without any reference to their purpose or literacy goal. (This feature is available, however, to CreativeCurriculum.net subscribers.) As a result, it is possible for some skill areas to not be included.

The curriculum is designed to develop oral language skills through extended conversations with the teacher in the interest areas, interactive story readings, and exposure to songs, rhymes, fingerplays, and movement activities. A significant

percentage of the curriculum materials are dedicated to examples of teacher modeling of good language patterns. Included are vignettes that illustrate how to use open-ended questions, extend conversations beyond the present, and describe and label objects related to the child's experiences in the classroom. To illustrate, when children are engaged in the Block Area, they may be asked to talk about their constructions, learn the names for the different shaped blocks or negotiate with other children to use certain blocks. The role of the teacher is to stimulate these conversations, introduce new words, model correct grammar, and expand thinking and reasoning skills. In the same way, children are to learn new vocabulary words when they listen to the teacher read stories, learn the words in songs, rhymes, fingerplays, and movement activities, and participate in first hand experiences. Teachers can select specific language-related activities from a list of 38 literacy activities described in the program. The program is designed to provide many opportunities for children to converse with each other and adults; however, it is highly dependent upon the planning and language skills of the teacher.

Phonological awareness instruction is rarely specified in the daily schedule. Of the 13 literacy objectives, only one focuses on developing this skill and that objective appears in few interest areas. In the Music and Movement Area, teachers are to encourage children to attend to the features of sounds, make up new words to familiar songs, and create rhythms. In the Library Area, teachers are encouraged to use books in which the author "plays" with language, as in the Dr. Seuss books. The Literacy volume also contains a chapter that includes several activities to develop phonological awareness skills specifically with examples of how to extend or modify the activities to meet the needs of each child. Most activities relate to singing songs or nursery rhymes and are introduced without regard to the developmental hierarchy of phonological awareness skills.

It is the intention of *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach* to promote knowledge of print by offering children opportunities to use environmental print and writing materials during play, to watch the teacher model reading and writing for different purposes, and to talk about the way print is organized on a page. Letter knowledge is addressed through activities that focus on learning letters in words, not in isolation. They encourage the sensory exploration of the alphabet through manipulatives and hearing the letter name or sound in the context of a word, but they do not support instruction of the individual letters as a worthwhile activity. Teachers use alphabet books and songs to talk about the letters without any particular order to the introduction of letter names or sounds, although the literacy manual describes the developmental sequence children tend to use in recognizing the letters. Although some children will learn to identify the letters of the alphabet through this method, some children may need a more explicit, systematic method of learning letter names and sounds.

Creative Curriculum offers a customized training plan to meet the pre-kindergarten program's professional development focus, needs, and budget. One option for professional development involves a long and intensive process beginning with an initial three days to learn the pedagogy and an additional six days throughout the year to learn how to integrate the components into a comprehensive program. An additional nine days of training are recommended for the second year of implementation along with 10 trainer visits to the classroom. With this amount of training, teachers are expected to have the skills to teach during "teachable moments" in *The Creative Curriculum* or in any model using a nonscripted approach. For ongoing support, teachers are encouraged to participate in the electronic discussion groups available through the Creative Curriculum's Listserv or to form small groups to work cooperatively. A scripted trainers' guide with workshop activities, transparencies and handouts is also available to support ongoing

professional development. Teaching Strategies, Inc., creators of *The Creative Curriculum*, also provides large regional training conferences and works with colleges to offer credit toward a degree in early childhood. The Implementation Checklist is a tool provided for administrators, trainers or teachers to assess the quality of implementation.

Research Support for Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach

Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach was published in the fall of 2004, and it does not yet have studies supporting the effectiveness of the program. Although the content information provided for teachers is aligned with current reading research, it does not explicitly state how this information is addressed in each activity within the program. Independent studies are needed to determine if the method of delivery used to teach this content actually result in effects.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach*:

- The program focuses on incorporating literacy skills throughout the day.
- The teacher's manual offers background knowledge in early literacy skills.
- Descriptive language is modeled and encouraged during all areas of play.
- Each interest area and literacy component includes a page of 'Tips' to share with the families.

Weaknesses of *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach*.

- There are no data to support the effectiveness of the program.
- The program requires teachers to do extensive organization and preparation for the daily lessons.
- Teachers need to understand the hierarchy of skill development to know which activities to choose to teach the skills sequentially.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement The Creative Curriculum for Preschool?

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool has been implemented in most districts throughout the State of Florida; however, the Literacy component, reviewed in this report was only available in September 2004.

For More Information

<https://www.teachingstrategies.com/bookshop/detail.cfm?productID=146>

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Date Posted: February, 2005

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