

Florida Center for Reading Research

Voyager Universal Literacy System

What is Voyager Universal Literacy System?

Voyager Universal Literacy System is a comprehensive K-3 (the grade 3 program is currently under development) reading system that includes an integrated curriculum for the following components: reading, writing and language arts, intervention and enrichment, progress monitoring, extended day and summer intervention, home study, strategies for English language learners, technology, and initial and ongoing professional development. The curriculum offers a detailed scope and sequence for skill development and provides materials for multi-sensory learning experiences. Each grade level focuses on a different adventure theme chosen to increase the students' interest and knowledge base. Grade level teacher guides provide detailed lesson plans for a daily two-hour reading period that include a 45-minute large group lesson, a 60-minute lesson for reading stations (three stations), and then a 15-minute writing, vocabulary, or spelling connection lesson.

Daily lessons begin in a whole group setting with teacher directed interactive activities that connect the key reading objectives to the literature selection and systematic instruction of writing, spelling or phonemic awareness. The reading stations follow with opportunities for collaborative learning and differentiated instruction. In two of the reading stations, students work together with a student team leader on previously introduced reading skills using manipulatives, literature books, activity books and decodable text that come with the *System*. In the third station, the teacher follows a detailed lesson plan for small group instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Procedures for immediate and specific error correction are prescribed for this small group instruction. Vocabulary expansion, monitoring and reviewing independent station activities and the Home Study assignment end the reading time.



Differentiated instruction based on the results of the program's progress monitoring system, Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP), ensures that each student works at the appropriate reading level. The VIP measures are essentially alternate forms of the widely used DIBELS measures developed by Dr. Roland Good. Struggling readers receive 10-30 minutes (depending on grade level) of additional instruction in the Reading Intervention Program by reviewing and reinforcing the skills and strategies from the core reading lesson. Skills are taught to mastery level before moving on. There is also an Extended Time Curriculum for these readers in first and second grade, which consists of an additional 4 ½ hours, including 30 minutes, 3 times a week designed to reinforce skills from the core curriculum. Students who are not "emerging" or "on-track" readers by the end of first grade will be provided the Summer Curriculum for a 4 week summer program at no cost. On-track, proficient readers have an additional program of enrichment activities for imaginative extensions of reading and language arts skills. The eVoyages CD Rom is the technology component of the program that provides students practice, reinforcement, and enrichment activities that are correlated with weekly lessons. All levels of readers have activities to reinforce, practice, or challenge skills in phonics, comprehension, fluency, language and writing.

Is Voyager Universal Literacy System aligned with Reading First?

This program has been specifically designed to be consistent with the five critical elements of reading instruction identified in Reading First documents as being important for reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Instruction is explicit and systematic using examples and non-examples to discriminate new skills and provides ample opportunities for student practice. Clearly specified goals exist for each grade level and frequent monitoring of progress determines the grouping and needs of students. Supplemental curricula (Intervention Reading, Extended Day, Enrichment, Home Study Workbooks, and CD Rom) are closely aligned with the core curriculum. Whole group time provides the foundation for small group lessons. Highly connected skills are taught explicitly then put into context. All phonemic awareness skills follow a developmental hierarchy. Phonics is taught systematically with special attention to high frequency letters first and similar letters appropriately spaced. A multisensory approach is used to decode words by raising a finger for each sound in a word and then sweeping over the fingers with the opposite hand to blend the word. Students practice these skills by reading decodable text. Vocabulary is pre-taught then practiced directly and in context. Expanding oral vocabulary is part of the comprehension and writing activities. Effective comprehension strategies include predicting, sequencing, developing background knowledge, cause and effect and explicit and implicit questioning on story grammar. Fluency instruction is promoted through the use of oral reading including repeated reading in groups, partners and individually using large group charts, small books and talking CD's. Timed readings for fluency occur during the VIP assessment 4 times a year.

The *Voyager Universal Literacy System* uses the progress monitoring system, Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP), to check a student's progress on critical developmental skills necessary for learning to read. All students at risk of failing are identified within the first month of school. These students are assessed using the VIP weekly so that progress can be monitored by the teacher and district staff. Every student is tested on specific benchmarks 4 times a year. Additional monitoring comes from the Assessment Checkpoints, a criterion referenced test, given at the end of each 6-week unit.

Professional development is delivered by a Senior Voyager Trainer and includes a two-day initial training for district and campus coaches and a three-day training for teachers supported by trained district and campus coaches. This five-day launch training is followed by eight 3-hour monthly training modules provided by *Voyager* and facilitated by campus coaches. Training videotapes and facilitator materials are provided. The initial training gives the teacher practice in administering the VIP testing measure, grouping students, modeling lessons and using explicit language for direct instruction. Ongoing professional development sessions provide opportunities for teachers to learn, practice and apply skills related to the five critical elements of reading, using data to make instructional decisions, providing instruction for struggling readers and implementing effective strategies for small group instruction. Further assistance is available through a field-based Literacy Consultant and a Dallas-based Program Director via on-site consultation, phone, and electronic mail.

Research Support for Voyager Universal Literacy System

Kindergarten and first grade materials for the *Universal Literacy System* were introduced in 1999, and the second grade curriculum was introduced in 2001. The Voyager company is strongly oriented to research, and there have been two studies to determine the effectiveness of the system conducted thus far.

In 2002 an independent study evaluated the effectiveness of the *Voyager* program with 58 economically disadvantaged kindergarteners over a three-month period in Orange County, Florida (Hecht & Torgesen, 2002). The research employed a pretest-posttest control group design in which kindergarten classes matched on initial performance were assigned to receive either the standard school curriculum or the Voyager system. Measures that are widely used in research to evaluate instructional effects were used in the study, and the groups were very similar on these measures at pre-test. At post-test, *Voyager* students significantly outperformed the control students in phonemic decoding ability, letter sound knowledge, print concepts, phonemic segmenting, and phonemic blending skills. There were no reliable differences between groups on measures of word identification, letter name knowledge, or spelling skill. This study also compared the average performance of *Voyager* students to the mean performance of U.S. children on nationally standardized measures of phonemic awareness. The *Voyager* students performed above average on these measures. These results are impressive considering the students received only 3 months of instruction.

Also during the 2001-2002 school year, another evaluation involving 177 kindergarten and first grade students in Birmingham, Alabama was conducted (Roberts, 2002). This study used a one-group pre-test/post-test design. Pre-tests were administered in October using the Woodcock Diagnostic Reading Battery (WDRB) and Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP). These same assessments were administered in May. Improvements in percentile rank scores for children in the *Voyager* program indicated that the instruction was sufficiently powerful to substantially reduce the number of children who were struggling in reading by the end of the year. For example, in kindergarten, the average percentile score of children receiving *Voyager* instruction improved from 47 to 66 on the Broad Reading Measure of the WDRP. In first grade, percentile scores on this measure increased from 39 to 61. The two measures, VIP and WDRB, yielded very comparable results.

In summary, the design and content of *Voyager Universal Literacy System* is aligned with what we know from current reading research. Two formal studies conducted on the efficacy of *Voyager* also provide a solid beginning level of support for the effectiveness of the program in improving reading outcomes for children who might otherwise be at-risk for reading failure. The *Voyager* company currently has two longitudinal studies in progress that will evaluate the effectiveness of the program over a multi-year period.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Voyager Universal Literacy System*:

- The program is well organized and sequenced, with built-in review of previously learned material.
- Provisions for immediate, intensive interventions for struggling readers are an integral part of the program.
- There is a strong research base for its effectiveness as a program that uses explicit instruction techniques.

- It provides a connection with the home through a home study guide and take home library.
- There is a strong professional development component.
- The multi-sensory approach and use of manipulatives (letters, puppets, additional books, board games, cards) are engaging for students.
- Frequent progress monitoring informs the teachers, principal and district of individual student growth.
- There are multiple books at each reading level.
- The program is closely aligned with Florida's Sunshine State Standards.
- Writing and written language skills are integrated into the lessons.

Weaknesses of Voyager Universal Literacy System:

- Some teachers may find the level of explicitness of the lesson plans incompatible with their teaching preferences.

Which Florida counties have schools that implement Voyager Universal Literacy System?

Orange County 407-317-3202

For More Information

www.voyagerlearning.com

References



Hecht, S.A. & Torgesen, J.K. (2002). *Voyager Universal Literacy System Program Evaluation in Orlando, Florida.*

Roberts, G. (2002). *Evaluation Report on the Impact of the Voyager Universal Literacy System in Birmingham Schools.*

Woodcock, R.W. (1987). *Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised.* Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

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