

Ready to Succeed

An Early Literacy and School Readiness Newsletter for Professionals

Hand-Eye Coordination and Literacy

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Hand-eye coordination is a necessary skill for written language. The best way to help children develop this skill is to let them play with toys and activities that involve looking at, using, and discriminating a number of different elements.

Puzzles are obviously a great activity for this but so are many other manipulative toys such as stacking and linking blocks, beading and lacing projects, and matching games.

Children can spend hours creating and building complex patterns with these types of toys, but they don't know they are engaged in a beneficial pre-literacy activities. They look at it as playing and having fun!

Studies have shown that spending time on hand-eye coordination activities improves children's ability to learn to read and often lessens the difficulty they face during the process. In fact engaging in a variety of art and craft activities, which most kids love, can be very beneficial for their hand-eye coordination!

Research further shows that early practice of hand-eye coordination activities reduces the risk for reading difficulties.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Puzzles help develop hand-eye coordination because learning to control hands and fingers according to information received

from sight is a coordination skill that helps children in early attempts at reading and writing.

Figuring out which piece goes where, working to fit pieces into their place by making adjustments, and seeing a sequence develop in an organized pattern can be a great learning experience as well as very satisfying for children.

Puzzles and matching games, etc are also important to help children learn visual discrimination. Visual discrimination is the ability of the brain to quickly tell the difference between visually similar letters, like p, b, and q or between words such as

(Continued on page 3)



Ready to Succeed aims to assist everyone involved with the development of young children to value and embrace their role in fostering early literacy and school readiness.

Stories for the Season

FRIENDSHIP

Featured Title:

The Adventures of Bob and Red
David Barron (9 Year Old Author)

Bob the Truck and Red the Tractor hear they are about to be ground up for scrap metal. When they escape from the junkyard, they experience a series of exciting situations and a frantic chase. Super-charged and loaded with action!

Best Friends Together Again
Alik

Clifford's Best Friend
Norman Bridwell

Friends
Helme Heine

Hello! Goodbye!
Alik

Hug Me
Patti Stren

I Like You the Way You Are
Eve Bunting

*John Brown, Rose and
the Midnight Cat*
Jenny Wagner

Little Blue and Little Yellow
Leo Lionni

Making Friends
Mr. Rogers

Making New Friends
Jacqueline H. Blumenstock

One Frog Too Many
Mercer Mayer

The Three Funny Friends
Charlotte Zolotow

GROUNDHOG DAY

Featured Title:

Go to Sleep, Groundhog!
Judy Cox

It's hibernation time, and Groundhog isn't a bit sleepy. But when he ventures outside between bouts of tossing and turning, seasonal sights and sounds reveal he's been dozing more than he thinks. Groundhog is a dear little character, especially when he's being tucked in by holiday emissaries (a friendly witch, a turkey, and Santa), who try to lull him back to sleep. It all comes to a satisfying close when Groundhog sees his shadow on February 2 and gratefully climbs back into bed for six more weeks.

*Andrew McGroundhog and
His Shady Shadow*
Peter J. Welling

A Garden for a Groundhog
Lorna Balian

Gretchen Groundhog, It's Your Day!
Abby Levine

The Groundhog Message
Barbara Birenbaum

It's Groundhog Day
Steven Kroll

Nothing Sticks Like a Shadow
Ann Tompert

The Secret of the First One Up
Iris Hiskey

Wake Up, Groundhog!
Susan Korman, et al

What Makes a Shadow?
Clyde Robert Bulla

VALENTINE'S DAY

Featured Title:

**A Possum's Happy
Valentine's Day**
Jamey M. Long

Do you know the meaning of Valentines Day? Join Opie, a curious little possum, on a heart-filled adventure. A stowaway in a boys backpack, Opie goes to school and learns the history of Valentine's Day and the reason for all the pink, red, and white. As he discovers the true meaning behind the celebration, young hearts will experience all the love and fun that the day can bring.

Henry and the Valentine Surprise
Nancy Carlson

Valentine's Are for Saying I Love You
Margaret Sutherland

Zelda's Puppy Love
Carol Gardner

Valentine ABCs
Patricia Reeder Eubank

Valentine's Day
Kathryn A. Imler

Will You Be My Valenswine?
Teresa Bateman

My Froggy Valentine
Matt Novak

Where is Baby's Valentine?
Karen Katz

My Fuzzy Valentine
Naomi Kleinberg

Yummiest Love
Lisa McCourt

Love, Splat
Rob Scotton



Hand-Eye Coordination and Literacy *continued*

(Continued from page 1)

was and saw. Students with difficulty making these distinctions often struggle with learning to read, write, and spell.

Playing games, engaging in activities, or with toys that help children discriminate



among similar objects can be fun for the child and help them master an important pre-literacy skill.

Encourage children to work their wrist and finger muscles as well as work on their coordination and small-motor skills to help prepare them for handwriting practice.

Play dough is an tool to use in helping children strengthen the muscles and coordination in their fingers and hands.

Making toys and manipulatives available to children will help ensure they select them on their own. This allows them the opportunity to practice their hand-eye coordination and visual discrimination skills as they play.

It doesn't matter which activity children choose...the important thing is that they are having fun, challenging their creativity and imagination...and learning.

The Learning Power of Laughter

Laughter has the power to heal and the power to teach. Humor has extensive benefits in the classroom – increased retention, decreased anxiety and enhanced interest in the subject matter. Dr. Avner Ziv of Tel Aviv University has done some intriguing research showing how humor can enhance learning and creativity.

“I am convinced that this is how it works: humor serves to capture students' attention (“tickling” their curiosity about the subject at hand)... to free up their attention (by allowing for the release of stressors which might otherwise have preoccupied them)... and to hold their attention (thus providing motivation and momentum for learning). Once you capture, free, and hold attention, then retention has a better chance of happening.”

Humor in Early Childhood

Humor is a vital part of a teacher's and a child's educational

experience because a sense of humor is learned. Like kindness or persistence, children learn by example. They model themselves after their parents, teachers, and others close to them.

For this reason, humorous parents often have humorous children.

There's no question that adults can encourage a child's sense of humor from the earliest days of infancy.

A sense of humor begins with infants mimicking their caregivers and parents and as cognitive and verbal abilities grow, so do laughter and humor. You can nourish a baby's sense of humor by encouraging him to play games that involve pretending.

For example, there's the old

favorite, peek-a-boo, in which you and baby momentarily pretend you're not there, only to quickly reappear. Toddlers, on the other hand, will find humor in wearing the hat, shirt, or slippers of an adult in their lives. And preschoolers tend to enjoy the incongruous. Four- and five-year olds find a great deal of amusement in stringing together rhyming words or nonsense syllables.



Why Is Laughter Important?

- Laughter is good for you. When you laugh the brain releases chemicals called endorphins, which make you feel good.
- Laughter knows no cultural boundaries. Two people do not have to speak the same language to laugh together.

Jackie Silberg. Reprinted with permission from January/February 2005 (Vol. 16, Issue 1) issue of *Earlychildhood NEWS*.

New Study: Poverty and Brain Development

A new study finds that particular brain functions of some low-income nine and ten year olds are far less developed in comparison with those of wealthy children. It is noted that the difference is almost equivalent to the damage from a stroke.

Lead researcher Mark Kishiyama, a cognitive psychologist at the University of California-Berkeley states, "It is a similar pattern to what's seen in patients with strokes that have led to lesions in their prefrontal cortex," which controls higher-order thinking and problem solving. "It suggests that in these kids, prefrontal function is reduced or disrupted in some way."

In this new study, researchers used an electroencephalograph (EEG) to measure brain function of 26 children while they watched images flashing on a computer. The children pressed a button when a tilted triangle appeared.

The researchers found a

difference in the low-income children's ability to detect the tilted triangles and block out distractions ~ a key function of the prefrontal cortex.

"It's just not functioning as efficiently as it could be, or as it should be," Kishiyama says. Though the effects of poverty are reversible, children need "incredibly intensive interventions to overcome this kind of difficulty," says Susan Neuman, an education professor at the University of Michigan.

This study contributes to growing evidence that shows how poverty impacts children's brains. For some time, researchers have pointed to the ravages of malnutrition, stress, illiteracy and toxic environments in low-income children's lives.

Research has shown that the

neural systems of poor children develop differently from those of middle-class children, affecting language development and "executive function," or the ability to plan, remember details, and pay attention in school.

These deficiencies are reversible through intensive intervention such as focused lessons and games that encourage children to think out loud or use executive function.

"It's really important for neuroscientists to start to think about the effects of people's experiences on their brain function, and specifically about the effect of people's socioeconomic status," says Martha Farah, director of the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania.

The study appears online in the *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* and will be published early next year. <http://jocn.mitpress.org/>



Word Wall Fun

If you have not done so already, consider adding a "word wall" to your room. This activity will help children with their language and literacy development. Not to mention the fun you can have with all the words!



WHAT YOU NEED:

construction paper (any color)
wide-tipped markers and scissors

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Decide the theme of your word wall in advance.
2. Cut the construction paper into 5" by 12" pieces.
3. Write one word on each piece of construction paper. Be sure to use the style of writing that the children will be learning in kindergarten.
4. You may start with 2 or 3

words and then have the children help with subsequent word additions.

5. The age of your children will determine the number of words placed on the wall.
6. Each day, point to and talk about the words that make up your word wall!



Poetry and Songs

WINTER TIME

A Finger Play

By Paula R. Westeren

It's winter time, the snow is falling
(wiggle fingers like falling snow)

We have to bundle up
(motion zipping up coat and
wrapping scarf around neck)

Make a snowman big and round
(arms in circle in front of you)

Give him eyes of coal
(make circles with thumb and
index fingers and put over eyes)

Brrr, brrr it's cold outside
(hug shoulders and shiver)

Let's go in and warm our hands
(wring hands together)

FRIENDSHIP

A Poem

by Paula R. Westeren

Friends are like leaves
All shapes and all sizes.
Kindness and goodness
Are what the best prize is.



When you're looking for friendship
Search 'til you find
The very best one
Who'll be one of kind.

PLAYING WITH FRIENDS

A Poem

By Paula R. Westeren

Friends, friends gather 'round
Tip toe, tip toe, make no sound
Find the toys so we can play
Build, create, mold with clay
Run, jump, skip, and hop
I'm so tired, I could drop!

SNOWFLAKES

Sung to: *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*
by: Jean Warren

Snowflakes, snowflakes dance
around
Snowflakes, snowflakes touch the
ground
Snowflakes, snowflakes in the air
Snowflakes, snowflakes
everywhere.

SNOWFLAKES FALLING

Sung to: *For He's a
Jolly Good Fellow*
by: Sonya Kranwinkel



Empieza a caer la
nieve,
Empieza a caer la nieve,
Snowflakes all around,
Falling to the ground.

Empieza a caer la nieve,
Empieza a caer la nieve,
Snowflakes all around,
Making not a sound.

RAIN FALLING DOWN

Sung to: *"Row, Row, Row Your Boat"*
by: Susan A. Miller

Rain, rain falling down,
(wiggle fingers downward)
Falling on the ground.
Pitter, patter, pitter, patter,
What a **lovely** sound.
(Repeat using words like squishy,
noisy, silly, etc. in place of lovely.)

Crafty Snowmen

Read a story such as *Snow Family*
by Daniel Kirk or *Snowballs* by Lois
Ehlert to the children and then
make these clever little snowmen.
Be sure to point out the different
items used for "dressing" and
decorating the snow people!

WHAT YOU NEED:

4 cups baby laundry detergent
flakes
1 cup water
bits of clean toilet tissue
large bowl
electric mixer
spoon
small paper plates

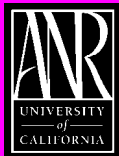
variety of decorative materials:
toothpicks
small sticks
buttons
felt
beads
pipe cleaners
yarn

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Pour the soap flakes into the large bowl.
2. Tear small pieces of toilet tissue and set aside.
3. Add the water to the soap flakes and mix with the electric mixer.

4. Drop toilet tissue pieces in while mixing. Mix until "doughy."
5. Spoon mixture onto paper plates.
6. Mold into two or three balls and stack on top of each other with the largest ball on the bottom.
7. Use the materials you have selected to dress the snowman.



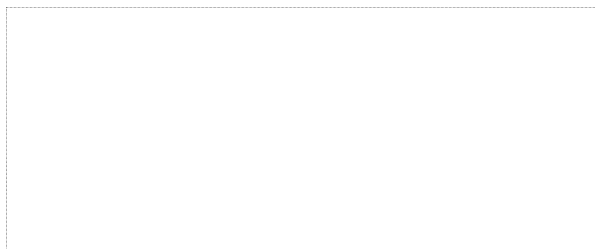


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Amazing, Magical Milk

This science activity will help the children in learning what colors are created when different colors are mixed together. You can also talk about action and reaction!

WHAT YOU NEED:

whole milk
 food coloring
 cookie sheet or jelly roll pan
 dish soap with "grease fighter"

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Pour the milk into the pan. The milk should be at least 1/4" deep.
2. Set aside so that the milk will reach room

temperature.

3. When milk is ready, carry pan carefully to a table so children will be able to see.
4. Drop 2 drops of each color of food coloring at various spots in the milk.
5. Have children notice what colors are there.
6. Drop one drop of the dish soap in the middle of the pan.
7. The colors will "magically" start spinning and swirling, creating new colors!
8. The degreaser in the soap reacts with the fat in the milk, causing the colorful reaction.



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