

Florida Center for Reading Research

Language First!

What is Language First!?

Language First! is a supplemental reading program designed to build vocabulary for English and Non-English speaking students in grades K-5. Although much of the program is delivered through technology, a portion of the program is implemented by the teacher. The goal of *Language First!* is to build oral language by introducing students to a wide range of vocabulary using a universal theme-based design. A four-leveled approach offers differentiated instruction to help develop English language proficiency. Level 1 (Beginner) focuses on word-picture identification. Level 2 (Early Intermediate) provides simple descriptions of people and behaviors in thematic settings. Level 3 (Intermediate) introduces new vocabulary and comprehension activities. Level 4 (Advanced) continues to develop grammar and meaning of content.

The program is multisensory and based on the premise that vocabulary building is an important part of language development. It provides ample opportunities for students to actively engage in vocabulary building by immersing them in visual, auditory, and tactile activities. However, oral production of language is not included in the program. Instruction in the *Language First!* program is primarily delivered via the LeapPad Learning System. The LeapPad Learning System is a digital technology tool designed to read coordinates on a grid, which allows for touch response. It contains two features, text enhancement (audio presentation of text) and a NearTouch Pen (interactive pen that activates pages by touching the LeapPad Books).

Language First! can be implemented in a typical classroom (for example, during whole or small group instruction), in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, or in a lab-type setting. The program's instructional design allows the teacher to differentiate instruction to suit the learning needs of all students within one classroom. In a lesson, students are read a story by the LeapPad, and instructed to listen to key vocabulary pertinent to the story. Students are asked to respond to questions about the story by pointing out correct responses (pictures or words) using the NearTouch Pen (e.g., Who is writing?, Who is cutting?, Where is the red square?). Some of the picture pages ask students to explore on their own by pointing to an object or person. During the individual exploration time, vocabulary words are repeated and corrective feedback via the Text Enhancement Feature is given to students regarding their choices. Correct responses receive feedback phrases like "wow," "great job," "good," or "perfect." Incorrect responses receive an encouraging feedback phrase of "Oops, that's a word, try again!"

Teacher materials include nine Teacher's Editions that provide lessons for each theme, reduced copies of student pages, tips and strategies for using the student books, multilevel activities, individual and whole group instruction, and reproducible student activity pages.

The Teacher Resource Kit includes four Posters to provide additional practice with letters and sounds; Teaching Strategies Cards that provide tips about effective instruction for the English Language; A Placement Guide that explains how to administer placement testing, the three options available, and an observational instrument to determine student progress; and a Skills Matrix that shows strategies and attainable skills at each of the four levels.



Language First![™]

Student materials consist of a LeapPad Classroom Learning System to activate pages and allow for touch response using the Near Touch Pen, read text and provide corrective feedback; Headphones that provide individual listening; LeapPad Backpack (optional) that allows LeapPad to be taken home; Student Books with Software Cartridges (thirty-six 6" x 9" paper books) that contain interactive graphics and provide audio presentation of text. All Student Books have an Interactive Picture Dictionary and Vocabulary List of new words.

The program offers three options (observation, elicitation, and testing) for placement testing to be used by the teacher to determine each student's proficiency level before implementation. *Language First!* suggests that the best chosen option should depend on teacher demands and class size. It reminds teachers to revisit placement decisions by continually observing their students and to remain flexible to reassignment since this means moving students to a different level, not theme.

How is *Language First!* Aligned with Current Reading Research?

The instructional content of programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR) includes the 5 components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension). In addition, instruction that is consistent with current reading research incorporates explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities, and aligned student materials. The goal of *Language First!* is to develop vocabulary and oral language skills. Therefore, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension are not explicitly taught. Phonemic awareness and comprehension activities are included but are not taught consistently throughout the program.

The theme-based design of *Language First!* provides real world contexts and incorporates research-based instructional strategies (e.g., utilizing concrete examples before moving to abstract ones, employing questioning techniques, teaching explicitly, monitoring comprehension in the form of questioning before, during, and after reading, using graphic organizers). Additionally, listening skills are taught by requiring students to follow clear-cut directions. The program's instructional content integrates research-based learning strategies such as using leveled vocabulary (beginning with simple grammatical structures of the English Language and moving to more complex ones) and teaching vocabulary in context.

Professional Development can be included with the purchase of the *Language First!* curriculum and customized to meet the needs of the school. The Professional Development component consists of 3 phases: Introduction, Implementation, and Continual Support. LeapFrog, publisher of *Language First!*, offers trainings that focus on the skills taught in the program integration and management of materials in the classroom, and the use of Placement Testing to individualize instruction. Additional training options include new or returning teacher review sessions, interim or evaluation sessions, and telephone mentoring.

Research Support for *Language First!*



Language First! was developed in 2002 and became available to schools in September of the same year. Due to the newness of the program, there is no empirical evidence at this time to validate the efficacy of *Language First!*. However, LeapFrog, publisher of *Language First!*, is collaborating with the Southwest Elementary School District (grades K-2) in a randomized study implementing *Language First!*. In addition, *Language First!* is being utilized in a current

longitudinal study. The results of this research will be available from LeapFrog in August 2004.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of Language First!:

- Content is designed for English and Non-Native Speakers of English.
- Curriculum is adaptive to the learning needs of the individual student.
- Differentiated instruction is utilized in the program.
- Interactive component makes instruction meaningful and actively engages the learner.
- Leveled introduction to vocabulary is emphasized in the program.
- Text Enhancement feature (audio presentation of text) of LeapPad enhances instruction for language-delayed learners and allows for repeated readings.
- Directions are spoken in several languages to ease the transition to English (e.g., English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Japanese, Hmong).
- Teacher materials are user friendly.
- Portable LeapPad allows for practice at home as well as school.

Weaknesses of *Language First!*:

- Instruction is leveled but not systematic.
- Corrective feedback feature contains technical glitches and effective scaffolding is not consistently used throughout the program.
- Word analysis is not included in the program.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Language First!?

Alachua	352-955-7527	Miami-Dade	305-995-1428
Bay	850-872-7700	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Bradford	904-966-6800	Okeechobee	863-462-5000
Broward	954-765-6271	Orange	407-317-3202
Collier	239-254-4100	Osceola	407-870-4008
Gadsden	850-627-0401	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Glades	863-946-2083	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Gulf	850-229-8256	Polk	863-534-0521
Hamilton	386-792-1228	Santa Rosa	850-983-5010
Highlands	863-471-5564	Sarasota	941-927-9000
Hillsborough	813-272-4022	St. Johns	904-819-7502
Jackson	850-482-1200	Volusia	386-734-7190
Jefferson	850-342-0100	Walton	850-892-8331
Lake	352-253-6510		

For More Information

www.leapfrogschoolhouse.com/Products/Language_first.asp

References



©Florida Center for Reading Research
227 N. Bronough St., Suite 7250 • Tallahassee, FL 32301
<http://www.fcrr.org> • 850-644-9352

Lead Reviewer: Sharon A. Smith, M.S.
Date Posted: May, 2004

Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: www.fcrr.org