

Florida Center for Reading Research

The Literacy Center

What is The Literacy Center?

The Literacy Center is a supplemental, interactive curriculum that combines technology with instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics for students in kindergarten through second grade. A grade specific teacher's manual consists of detailed lesson plans for phonemic awareness and phonics. *The Literacy Center's* technology provides structured, multi-sensory opportunities for children to learn early reading skills. There are three separate electronic components of this reading curriculum: 1) LeapDesk, 2) LeapMat, and 3) LeapPad.

Three modes constitute the LeapDesk (one per classroom with earphone capability): learning, assessment, and adaptive teaching. In the learning mode, students work independently on phonemic awareness, letter recognition, letter sound association, and letter formation. The assessment mode of the LeapDesk incorporates screening and progress monitoring of phonological awareness, letter names, and letter sounds. The results are printed out and include detailed reports for each student, a class summary, and a parent note stating how the assessment was administered and suggesting activities to work on at home. Teachers can also use the results from this assessment to individualize instruction. When the LeapDesk is in the adaptive mode, it administers individualized lessons for each student based on the data gathered in the assessment mode.

The LeapMat (one per classroom) is a large mat consisting of lowercase letters with a subscript of uppercase letters next to each lowercase. The Teacher's Edition for the LeapMat provides 28 small group activities. The LeapMat works on a wall, floor, or table and can be used individually or for group instruction. A switch at the top of the LeapMap allows the teacher or student to change the mode, which provides practice in letter name recognition, letter sound association, and the spelling of CVC words.



Students practice reading connected text with the LeapPad (6 per classroom with earphone capability). The interactive technology of this electronic pad allows books to "talk" to students. Students use an electronic pen to hear words read, sound out words, or spell words. The series of books are engaging and based on levels that focus on different phonics concepts.

In addition to these three electronic components, *The Literacy Center* curriculum provides interactive decodable books, phonics skill cards, letter tiles, music, and posters. In terms of implementation, students can interact independently with the technology at literacy centers or in small groups directed by the teacher.

A Links Program has been created to integrate *The Literacy Center's* lessons and activities into core reading programs. The Links Program is a set of instructional cards that correlate basal reading programs to *The Literacy Center* technology. Currently, this Links Program is correlated, lesson by lesson, with the kindergarten and first grade Open Court reading curriculum. The instructional cards match the page and skill focus from Open Court to *The Literacy Center* activities that support it. There are plans for the Links Program to align with Houghton Mifflin and other core reading programs.

Is The Literacy Center aligned with Reading First?

The Literacy Center is intended to supplement existing programs and provides a systematic approach for students to learn and practice phonological awareness and phonics. Phonological awareness is taught through carefully planned listening modules that gradually introduce sounds from the environment, individual words, syllables, onset-rime, and then phonemes. At the phoneme level, sequential modules provide practice in matching, isolating, blending, segmentation, and manipulation.

The Literacy Center addresses phonics and word building with the LeapDesk, using upper and lower-case plastic letters to match sounds to letters and segment and blend words. The LeapMat provides opportunities for students to build real and invented words by manipulating letters. When students build a real word, they are verbally rewarded with the word being blended as well as receiving positive feedback, such as, "Great job!" When students spell a non-word, the verbal feedback says each letter sound in the order the student designated and then instead of blending the sounds, the verbal feedback is, "Great sounds! Try again." The LeapPad integrates high quality stories with technology that allow students to slide an electronic pen across an unknown word to assist in the decoding process. Even though fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are not explicitly taught, these essential components are addressed when students interact with books utilizing the LeapPad. For example, fluency can be developed as students repeatedly read stories or follow along as the story is read aloud. Vocabulary can also be enhanced when students use the electronic pen to press on a word twice to hear its definition.

Professional development for *The Literacy Center* consists of a hands-on, half-day or full day of on-site training that focuses on how to use the program as well as how to integrate and manage the program in the classroom. Professional development can also be customized for a school or district.

Research Support for The Literacy Center

The Literacy Center, a fairly new program developed in 1999, incorporates sound practices in terms of phonological awareness and phonics. A study conducted in Northern California supporting the use of *The Literacy Center* is reported on the LeapFrog SchoolHouse website. This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of *The Literacy Center* as a supplement to a comprehensive basal reading curriculum with 47 kindergarten students participating in a summer program. Both the experimental and control groups received 75 minutes of daily instruction with the same basal program. The experimental group received 30 minutes daily of supplemental instruction with *The Literacy Center* and the control group received 30 minutes daily of supplemental instruction with district materials such as phonics readers, pattern books, and letter-sound flip cards and games. This instruction occurred over a three-week period, with the experimental group given the opportunity to take home the LeapPad. Using sub-tests from CORE (1999), both groups reflected significant gains in letter-sound knowledge, decoding, and phonemic awareness. Even though there was a significantly greater gain for the experimental group, it is important to note that this difference may be attributed to variable incoming levels of performance as the experimental group's pre-test scores were lower on each measure. Various supportive reports are also located on *The Literacy Center's* website at:



http://www.leapfrogschoolhouse.com/research/Case_studies.asp

We conclude that *The Literacy Center's* instructional content in phonological awareness and phonics is consistent with the most recent research on teaching beginning reading. There are plans for further research to determine the effectiveness of *The Literacy Center*. Currently, there is a multi-site, longitudinal, experimental study being conducted by a third party research corporation. The purpose of this study is to determine whether supplementing a comprehensive reading program with *The Literacy Center* in kindergarten and first grade is more effective in preparing young children to become successful readers than the comprehensive reading program alone. These further studies of *The Literacy Center* curriculum over longer durations of time will help determine the extent to which it is helpful in the reading growth of children.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *The Literacy Center*:

- Error correction and scaffolding are built into the technology.
- This program can be incorporated as a literacy center in the classroom where students are engaged academically at their independent or instructional levels.
- The multi-sensory approach and use of manipulatives (letters, books, cards, voices) are engaging for students. It may also be helpful for students who require multiple modes of input for maximal learning.
- Home connection letters (printed in English or Spanish) help parents know what skills to work on at home.
- The Links Program aligns with the core curriculum to help teachers organize literacy centers that are individualized.

Weaknesses of *The Literacy Center*:

- The LeapMat does not provide a record of student activity, so there is no way for the teacher to monitor student learning activities on this part of the program other than direct observation.

Which Florida counties have schools that implement The Literacy Center?

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| Monroe County | 305-293-1400 |
| Hillsborough County | 813-272-4000 |
| St. Lucie County | 561-468-5000 |
| Columbia County | 386-755-8000 |
| Miami Dade County | 305-995-1206 |
| Duval County | 904-390-2000 |
| Broward County | 954-765-6000 |
| Manatee County | 941-741-7200 |
| Pasco County | 813-996-3600 |
| Sarasota County | 941-927-9000 |
| Citrus County | 352-726-1931 |
| Okeechobee County | 863-462-5000 |
| Hernando County | 352-797-7000 |
| Highlands County | 863-471-5555 |
| Escambia County | 850-432-6121 |
| Gulf County | 850-229-8256 |
| Clay County | 904-284-6500 |
| Alachua County | 352-955-7300 |

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| Polk County | 863-534-0500 |
| Osceola County | 407-870-4600 |
| Seminole County | 407-320-0000 |
| Lake County | 352-343-3531 |
| Orange County | 407-317-3200 |
| Collier County | 941-643-2700 |
| Monroe County | 305-293-1400 |
| Hardee County | 863-773-9058 |
| Volusia County | 386-734-7190 |
| Brevard County | 321-631-1911 |
| Leon County | 850-487-7100 |
| Okaloosa County | 850-833-3100 |

For More Information

http://www.leapfrogschoolhouse.com/Products/literacy_center.asp

References



Consortium on Reading Excellence, Inc (CORE, 1999). *Assessing reading: Multiple measures for kindergarten through eighth grade*. Navato, CA: Arena Press.

Lead Reviewer: Marcia L. Grek, Ph.D.
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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