

Ready to Succeed

An Early Literacy and School Readiness Newsletter for Professionals

The Developing Brain

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What we know about how the brain develops has changed dramatically over the last several years.

Scientists have learned more in the last decade about how the brain

works than in all previous history.

Infants were once that to be cuddly little creatures not capable of much learning in their first years of life. Now we recognize that they are in a critical period of brain development that will affect their learning and functioning for life.

By the time a child is three years old, the brain will form well more than a trillion connections. This is twice the amount of connections in adult brains.

The connections that neurons make with each other are called



synapses. One cell can be connected to 10,000 other cells. Research tells us that the peak period for synapses to develop is from birth to age ten.

The following is a brief summary of what we know about early brain development:

- ✓ The capacity to learn is a combination of nature (genetics) and nurture (environment). Nature provides the complex structure of brain circuitry, but how it is wired depends upon a child's environment (surroundings, stimulation, nutrition, etc.)
- ✓ Early experiences, beginning prior to birth, determine brain structure and capacities. The quality, quantity, and consistency of stimulation is key to healthy brain development.
- ✓ The brain develops in

the context of human interactions and caring relationships. Warm supportive relationships promote learning and provide an important buffer against stressors. Infants and children who do not have these relationships will have adverse development that can last a lifetime.

- ✓ There are windows of opportunity for brain development. During these times the brain is more capable of learning certain functions. The first five years of life are especially critical for this development.
- ✓ Brain development is not a step-by-step process. It is more like a spiral with waves that lasts a lifetime.

Junge, S. K. & Manglallan, S. (2005). *Let's Read Together...An early literacy curriculum*. University of California, Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Cooperative Extension.



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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.

Bring it to Me!



This game works well for toddlers who are 21-24 months old. But any age can play ~ you know the abilities of your group best. It will foster language development, listening, and problem-solving skills. As you play, the toddlers will hear the name of an object, make an association, and then find the object.

Children this age often enjoy putting things in and taking things out of boxes, bags, any kind of container, so its sure to be fun, too!

WHAT YOU NEED:

Large grocery sack or similar bag
Items from around the room
One, two, or three toddlers

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Look around the room and pick out several objects that the children can reach and carry safely.
2. Ask one child to bring you the blue block to put in the bag. Be sure to say the child's name when you ask the question. When she brings it to you say, "Thank you for bringing me the blue block!"
3. Ask the next child to bring you the red truck. When he returns with it say, "Thank you for bringing me the red truck!"
4. Ask the last child to bring you the green book. When she

5. does, again say "Thank you..."
5. Continue for another round or two, depending on the attentiveness of the toddlers.
6. After you have the objects in the bag, ask each child one by one to return an object to its place. Again, be sure to say her name as you give the directions. Say, "Thank you for putting the blue block away!"
7. Continue until all the objects are put back.
8. Keep in mind that this game isn't so much about finding the "right" object as it is about listening, speaking, and problem-solving. If a child needs help finding the object, gently guide him to it and say, "Here is the orange ball!"
9. This listening game can be played indoors or out!

Snowflake Fun



Keeping active children occupied during days of inclement weather can be a challenge for child

care providers. It is important for children to have opportunities for physical activity even when they can't go outside.

Books provide lots of possibilities! Here are a couple of fun things to do after reading the book *Millions of Snowflakes* by Mary McKenna Siddals.

◆ THE SNOWFLAKE DANCE

WHAT YOU NEED:

one length of any color wide ribbon per child ~ 12-18 inches long
CD or tape of soft classical music
CD player
large, safe indoor area

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Give each child a length of ribbon.
2. Have them stand in various spots around the room at least arms length apart.
3. Play the music.
4. Ask the children to slowly dance and sway around the room pretending to be snowflakes falling from the sky like they saw in the story!

◆ FIND THE SNOWFLAKES

WHAT YOU NEED:

white construction paper
snowflake pattern or you can make your own
Scissors and large bowl

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Cut out many snowflakes from the white paper.
2. Hide the snowflakes around the room. The age of the children will determine how well you hide the snowflakes.
3. Have the children take turns two at a time to find two snowflakes and put them in the large bowl.
4. When all the snowflakes have been found, count how many were found.

Snuggle Up and Read...

HONESTY

Featured Title:

Alex Did It!

by Udo Weigelt

Three rambunctious little hares come up with what they think is a clever way to make mischief without getting into trouble with the other animals. They just blame everything on an imaginary hare named Alex. Then one day a new hare arrives in the forest ~ you guessed it ~ named Alex!

A Big Fat Enormous Lie
Marjorie Sharmat

The Boy Who Cried Wolf
Aesop

David Gets In Trouble
David Shannon

A Day's Work
Eve Bunting

Edwurd Fudwupper Fibbed Big
Berkeley Breathed

Jackalope
Janet Stevens

Jamaica's Find
Juanita Havill

Pinky Promise: A Book About Telling the Truth
Vanita Braver

The Principal's New Clothes
Stephanie Calmenson

Ruby and the Muddy Dog
Helen Stephens

The True Francine
Marc Brown

Truthful Harp
Alexander Lloyd

VALENTINE'S DAY

Featured Title:

If You'll Be My Valentine

by Cynthia Rylant

A little boy creates and presents valentines to his pets, family members, and even his teddy bear in this appealing picture book. Told entirely in rhyme, the story commemorates kindness as well as love.

Happy Valentine's Day, Delores
Barbara Samuels

The Valentine Express
Nancy Elizabeth Wallace

Rhyme Time Valentine
Nancy Poydar

The Day it Rained Hearts
Felicia Bond

Sweet Hearts
Jan Carr

The Night Before Valentine's Day
Natasha Wing

A Valentine for Norman Noggs
Valiska Gregory

Froggy's First Kiss
Jonathan London

Heart to Heart
George Shannon

Valentine
Carol Carrick

Dinosaur Valentine
Liza Donnelly

One Very Best Valentine's Day
Joan W. Blos

The Valentine Bears
Eve Bunting

WINTER

Featured Title:

Sleep, Black Bear, Sleep

by Jane Yolen

When winter's snow creates a soft blanket of silence, nothing is more comforting than curling up under a cozy quilt. Whether in a warm bed, a rocking hammock, or a nest of leaves, the feeling of comfort and the world of dreams come through. The gentle illustrations show that the little details in everyone's niche truly make a place into a home.

One Winter's Day
Christina M. Butler

The Twelve Days of Winter
Deborah Lee Rose

Three Pebbles and a Song
Eileen Spinelli

Snow
Manya Stojic

It's Winter!
Linda Glaser

Just a Snowy Vacation
Mercer Mayer

The Snow Bear
Miriam Ross

Red Fox Running
Eve Bunting

Winter is the Warmest Season
Lauren Stringer



Celebrate Backwards Day!

Start out the new year in a wacky and fun way by observing Backwards Day on January 31st. Talk with your families in advance and enlist their help in making this a terrific day for the children. I'm sure they'll come up with additional ideas to celebrate!

Here are several activities to get you started in making the most of a craaaazy day:

- ☺ Say good night or good evening when children arrive in the morning and good morning when they leave at the end of the day.
- ☺ If your program serves breakfast, serve foods that are more typically dinner foods for the first meal.
- ☺ Since we normally wear

clothes during the day and pajamas at night ~ wear pajamas to the program. For added fun, wear them backwards.

- ☺ Change your daily schedule and do everything in reverse order. Start with the last thing and work toward the first.
- ☺ Read stories from the end to the beginning ~ either word by word or page by page.
- ☺ Depending on the ages and abilities of the children in your care, walk backwards throughout the day. Be sure the children can safely do so and the room arrangement will be safe.
- ☺ Introduce children to palindromes ~ words and names that are spelled and pronounced the same way

whether you start at the beginning or the end. For example: Hannah, Otto, tot, mom, dad, racecar.

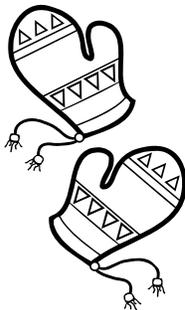
- ☺ Read the book *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood.



- "Silly Sally went to town walking backwards, upside down..."
- ☺ Say thank you when you ask for something and please when you receive it. Or say yes for no and no for yes!
- ☺ Play board games in reverse ~ start at the end.
- ☺ Sing a song backwards!
- ☺ Use your imagination and creativity to come up with more fabulous ideas!

Pita Mittens

The Mitten by Jan Brett is an adaptation of a Ukrainian folk tale. It tells the story of Nicki, a young boy who loses one of the white mittens his grandmother knitted for him in the snow. The forest animals find the mitten and try to make a home of it!



After reading the story with the children, try making this yummy and nutritious snack. Help the children make the connection to the story ~ the pita

pocket is like a mitten ~ the animals going inside it is like putting the ingredients in the pita. It is important to do activities with the children that extend their experiences with books that have been read to them. This reinforces learning and comprehension!

WHAT YOU NEED:

pita bread ~ half or quarter per child
chunk light tuna packed in water
apples ~ any variety
low fat mayonnaise
lettuce (optional)
knife, spoon, and bowl

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Everyone who will be making a pita mitten needs to wash their hands.
2. Drain tuna and set aside.
3. Wash and dice apples into very small pieces.
4. Mix the tuna and apples together with a small amount of mayonnaise.
5. Cut the pita pockets in half or quarters and stuff with tuna and apple mixture. If you are using lettuce, put part of a leaf in on top of the tuna.
6. Enjoy the pita mittens with a glass of milk or water and talk about the story.

Surprising Results from New Study

In an unprecedented study, researchers at Northwestern University have concluded that children who enter elementary school with basic math and reading skills are most likely to achieve academic success. Surprisingly, the study further showed that early math skills have the strongest predictive power, followed by reading and lastly attention skills.

Using existing data from six longitudinal studies of 35,000 preschool age children in the United States, Canada, and England, the authors of "School Readiness and Later Achievement" measured school readiness skills and behaviors when a child entered school around five years of age and measured for academic achievement between the ages of seven and fourteen.



Greg Duncan, the study's primary author and Northwestern's Tarry Professor of Education and Social Policy stated, "The paramount importance of early math skills ~ of beginning school with a knowledge of numbers, number order, and other rudimentary math concepts ~ is one of the puzzles coming out of the study. Mastery of early math skills not only predicts future math achievement, it also predicts future reading achievement." These and other patterns were similar for boys and girls and for children from all economic backgrounds.

Another surprising outcome from the study is the lack of association between social and emotional behaviors and later academic success. "Children who engage in aggressive or disruptive behaviors or who have difficulty making friends wind up learning just as much as their better behaved or more socially adjusted classmates, provided that they come to school

with academic skills," said Duncan.

Appearing in the November issue of *Developmental Psychology*, Duncan further stated, "certainly we're not suggesting that preschool programs abandon play and impose dull 'drill-and-practice' curricula. Play-based curricula designed with the developmental needs of children in mind can foster the development of academic and attention skills in ways that are engaging and fun."



More information about the study and its findings can be found online by visiting Northwestern's website at www.northwestern.edu/ipr or by visiting the "Journals" section of the American Psychological Association's website at www.apa.org.

Finger Play Fun

I Built a Little Snowman

Author Unknown

I built a little snowman.
(make circle with hands)
He had a carrot nose.
(point to nose)
Along came a bunny.
(hold up first two fingers, slightly bent)
And what do you suppose?
(shrug shoulders)
That hungry little bunny,
(make bunny again)

Looking for his lunch,
(hop bunny fingers around)
Ate the snowman's nose!
(pretend bunny is eating nose)
Nibble! Nibble! Crunch!

I Am a Snowman

Author Unknown

I am a snowman, cold and white.
(make a circle with each hand and put one on top of the other)
I stand so still all through the night.

(hold hands still)

I have a carrot nose way up high,
(point to nose)
And a lump of coal to make each eye
(point to each eye)
I have a muffler made of red
(point to neck)
And a stovepipe hat upon my head
(point to top of head)





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Newsletter Evaluation

Thank you to everyone who so graciously responded to our request for another newsletter evaluation! We truly appreciate your time and your feedback. Results were still being tabulated as this edition went to print, but we hope to have a summary for you in the March/April issue.

Congratulations to Kristen M. of Grass Valley for being the first online respondent and to Melanie M. of Granite Bay for being the first mailed in respondent for the *Ready to Succeed Newsletter for Professionals*. They each received a new copy of the book *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood as a bonus prize! Thank you again to everyone who replied!

Host a Workshop!

Do you have a couple of hours available on your calendar for a weekday evening or Saturday morning? Do you have space for 10-20 people to sit at tables?

I am looking for a child care provider or center-based program that would be interested in hosting a workshop/training for you and your fellow providers! There would be a prize for hosting and random prizes for those who attend!

Are you interested in obtaining more professional growth or CARES hours by attending? Call or email Paula today!

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