

Florida Center for Reading Research

Language for Learning

What is Language for Learning?

Language for Learning (a revised version of SRA's Distar Language I program) is a language program designed to teach young pre-readers language, concepts, information, and knowledge that will be beneficial to them in a classroom setting as they are learning to read. It was written to teach oral language skills to five and six-year-old children whose language is inadequately developed, to four-year-old preschoolers, to primary students for whom English is their second language, to Title 1 and special education students, and to children in speech/language classes. The program uses an explicit instructional approach, entailing scripted lessons, signaled responses, immediate error correction, cumulative review, and mastery learning. *Language for Learning* is comprised of six learning strands: actions, descriptions of objects, information and background knowledge, instructional words and problem-solving concepts, classification, and problem-solving strategies. A typical 30-minute class lesson might include a number of exercises drawn from any or all of the strands. The teacher directs the lessons, including a practice workbook page that accompanies each lesson (each child works individually on a workbook page). The lessons are taught to small groups of 4 to 8 students in the beginning stages of learning and 8 to 12 students for those who are more advanced. This program can be used for whole group instruction as well.



Is Language for Learning aligned with Reading First?

Language for Learning is a pre-reading program that emphasizes oral language. It does not encompass phonemic awareness or phonics skills. However, it systematically teaches commonly used vocabulary words that are useful in the school and community settings. Fluency in speech is taught through the teacher modeling complete sentences for the students, and having the children repeat the sentences both chorally and individually. The *Language for Learning* curriculum is structured to provide 30 minutes of language instruction per day. It offers teachers a 3-hour training session that covers the program's scope and sequence and gives them practice in teaching using Direct Instruction. On-going professional development and coaching is provided through school visits on the following schedule: year one-3 visits; year 2-two visits; and year 3-one visit.

Research Support for Language for Learning

Language for Learning stands on a strong foundation of research which supports the Direct Instruction method of teaching/learning (Becker & Gersten, 1982; Lloyd, Cullinan, Heins, & Epstein, 1980; Lloyd, Epstein, & Cullinan, 1981). In addition, there have been recent studies in peer-reviewed educational journals focusing on *Language for Learning* specifically. Waldron-Soler, Martella, Marchand-Martelly, Warner, Miller & Tso (2002) conducted a study of the effects of the implementation of *Language for Learning* in three separate preschool settings. Random assignment was not used in forming these groups. After 15 weeks of intervention, the *Language for Learning* group surpassed the control group on measures of receptive and expressive

language, and in social interaction skills. This was found to be true for children in the preschool both with and without developmental delays.

Another study of 45 kindergarten students enrolled in two elementary schools examined the effects of *Language for Learning* on receptive language skills (Benner, et al., 2002). Results favoring *Language for Learning* over a control group on the receptive language skills of vocabulary, grammatical morphemes, and elaborated sentences and phrases were found to be both statistically and educationally significant.

In sum, research supports the *Language for Learning* format and method. Studies that have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Language for Learning* program have employed the use of control groups, which increases our confidence that the methods and content of the program are beneficial to young children. Although there is no research that directly demonstrates an effect of the *Language for Learning* program on word reading ability or reading comprehension, there is sufficient evidence to support its use to stimulate the development of oral language skills in young children.



Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Language for Learning*:

- There is a strong research base for its effectiveness as a program that uses explicit instruction techniques to improve children's receptive and expressive language skills, and social interaction skills.
- *Language for Learning* fills an important niche in the pre-reading development of children with inadequate language skills.
- Little teacher preparation is required, as lessons are completely scripted.
- Individual progress monitoring for each child is recorded on a skills profile folder.
- The content of the *Language for Learning* curriculum is specifically written to be useful in educational settings.
- Teachers have the option of teaching children who are able to progress more quickly at an accelerated rate by only teaching starred exercises in each lesson.

Weaknesses of *Language for Learning*:

- Some teachers find it difficult to adapt to the repetitive style of instruction and emphasis on carefully following a script.

Which Florida counties have schools that implement Language for Learning?


Alachua County	352-955-7572
Duval County	904-390-2115
Escambia County	850-469-6130
Gadsden County	850-627-9651
Lake County	352-343-3531
Leon County	850-487-7147
Madison County	850-973-5022
Marion County	352-671-7702
Orange County	407-317-3202
Sarasota County	941-927-9000
Taylor County	850-838-2500

For More Information

http://www.sra4kids.com/product_info/direct/standard.phtml?CoreProductID=23

References

Becker, W.C. & Gersten, R. (1982). Follow-up of Follow Through: The later effects of the Direct Instruction model on children in fifth and sixth grades. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 75-92.

 Benner, G.J., Trout, A., Nordness, P.D., Nelson, J.R. Knobel, M, Epstein, A., Maguire, K., Birdsell, R. & Epstein, M.H. (2002). The effects of the *Language for Learning* program on the receptive language skills of kindergarten children. *Journal of Direct Instruction*, 2 (2).

Lloyd, J., Cullinan, D., Heins, E.D., & Epstein, M. (1980). Direct Instruction: Effects on oral language and written language comprehension. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 3, 70-76.

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Waldron-Soler, K.M., Martella, R.C., Marchand-Martella, N.E., Warner, D.A., Miller, D.E., & Tso, M.E. (2002). Effects of a 15-Week Language for Learning Implementation with Children in an Integrated Preschool. *Journal of Direct Instruction* 2(2), 75-86.

Lead Reviewer: Carol Robinson, Ph.D.
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Please send comments about this report to Marcia L. Grek, Ph.D.: reports@fcrr.org