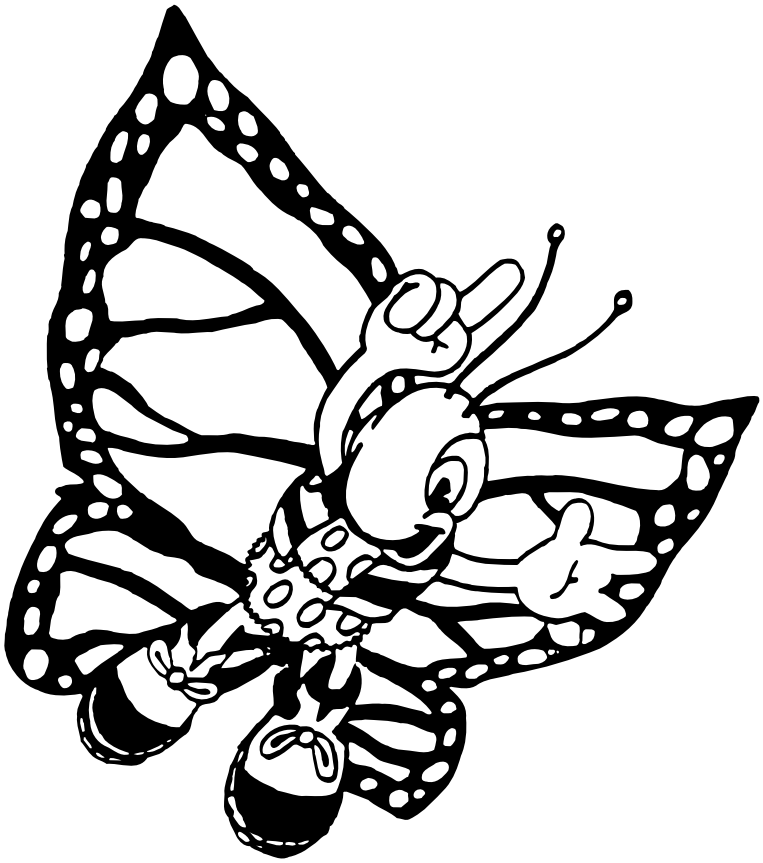

Ready to Learn:

Teaching Students How to Succeed in School

by
Greg Brigman, Ph.D.
David Lane, Ph.D.
Donna Lane, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Overview of Ready To Learn

Ready To Learn is a classroom program for children ages 4 to 7 (grades Pre-K-1) that is designed to promote the learning skills and social skills needed for school success. RTL is part of a PreK-12 model designed to help students develop the cognitive, social and self-management skills needed for academic and social success (see Chapter 6 for more details on the Grade 2-3 program, Ready for Success, and the Grade 4-12 program, Student Success Skills or go to www.studentsuccessskills.com).

RTL was designed as a prevention and early intervention program to help children develop the ability to be successful in school. The program focuses on abilities that are pre-requisites to learning more complex skills such as reading, writing and math. These abilities include paying attention, listening, social skills, and cognitive strategies such as understanding story structure and asking effective questions. In developing *Ready To Learn*, the authors reviewed over 20 years of educational research to identify the skills/behaviors/abilities most frequently cited in the literature as predictors of long term school success, and the teaching methods which have been demonstrated as effective in helping young children acquire these abilities.

Ready To Learn has been field tested and researched with thousands of children, including Head Start, kindergarten, readiness, and first grade classrooms. In addition, three well designed studies have been conducted on the RTL program and the results have consistently been very positive. A summary of this research is provided in Chapter 6.

Ready To Learn incorporates many of the current guidelines for quality programs from: The National Reading Panel's 2003 publication, "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its implications for Reading Instruction; The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2003); and The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2006).

RTL includes the use of "Big Book" read aloud stories, teacher and student storytelling and writing, art, dramatic play, puppets, singing, instruction on comprehension through understanding story structure, practice with listening and attending, and social collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction.

RTL is built around a series of stories about "Fuzzy and His Friends." Fuzzy is a caterpillar (and later a butterfly) who is the central character in the stories. Along with some help from his friends, Fuzzy teaches children four important learning/social skills.

- Paying attention
- Listening and understanding (including story structure)
- Asking key questions to clarify understanding
- Encouraging self and others (including working cooperatively and empathy)

Over 20 years of educational research identify these skills as some of **the most predictive of later school success.** Once the children are introduced to the learning and social skills presented in the RTL stories, they are given time to apply the skills through five teacher strategies which involve reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Teachers using the RTL program report that they like the fact that most of the application takes place during their regular classroom activities and that it fits easily with their existing curriculum.

The five teaching strategies are:

- Modeling, Coaching, Cueing
- Student Story Telling
- Student Story Retelling
- Positive Peer Reporting
- Encouragement Council

Research shows that these teacher strategies significantly increase the critical learning/social skills listed above (for research background on these strategies see Chapter 6). Teachers using RTL report that together these four learning/social skills and five teacher strategies foster academic achievement, a supportive classroom environment, and healthy self-esteem.

How RTL Was Developed?

RTL was developed over a seven year period and included:

- an extensive review of the research on early childhood learning
- continuous consultation with preschool, kindergarten and first grade teachers as well as early childhood specialists, psychologists, school counselors, school administrators and curriculum specialists.
- field testing of all components of the RTL Program with thousands of children.
- three research projects evaluating RTL with over 800 children.

In relation to comparison classes, students in classrooms using the RTL materials and strategies showed significant improvement in listening comprehension, ability to pay attention and social skills.

Strengths of RTL

- RTL focuses on the skills/behaviors most predictive of long-term school success and achievement in reading and math.
- RTL is preventive—it helps children before they fail.
- All children benefit—RTL is not a pullout program.
- The four skills and five teacher strategies have a strong research base.
- The RTL program has a strong research record.
- RTL is easily incorporated into most early childhood curriculums.

Overview of the "Fuzzy" Stories

The five stories around which RTL is built are:

1. *"Fuzzy and the Time of Great Change"*, which gives an overview of all four skills;
2. *"Fuzzy and the Secret of Flowers"*, focusing on paying attention;
3. *"Fuzzy and the Daring Rescue",* addressing listening and understanding;
4. *"Fuzzy and the Final Lesson",* emphasizing asking effective questions; and
5. *"Fuzzy and the Great Migration"* targeting encouragement of self and others.

In the overview story, Fuzzy is a caterpillar who fails to learn how to spin a cocoon, for his metamorphosis to a butterfly, because of off-task behavior. Four new forest friends teach Fuzzy the learning skills listed above, so he can learn to build a cocoon, and complete his "big change." The four stories which follow highlight Fuzzy utilizing his new skills and helping others to learn these skills in order to be successful butterflies. Thus, through the use of metaphors, children are taught the importance of effective communication/social skills, learning skills, and helping/encouraging others.

Materials

The complete *Ready To Learn* (RTL) Program contains the following:

1. A teacher's manual that gives an overview of the model and serves as a resource for guiding activities and using the Fuzzy stories. This manual includes the theoretical underpinnings and research support of the model which help the teacher thoroughly understand the concepts the model is trying to teach, and assists the teacher in generalizing the behaviors to day-to-day life. Each RTL teacher strategy and student skill is presented with easy to use ideas and activities suggested which reinforce the skills/behaviors covered in the lesson.
2. Two RTL story books which contain the five Fuzzy and the Time of Great Change and Fuzzy's Great Adventures stories.
3. An audio CD with five recorded stores, one for each of the five stories which allow the children to listen to the stories while reading along in the book. Drawing, writing, and pair and small group sharing activities help deepen children's understanding of key ideas.
4. A PowerPoint presentation that provides a brief overview of the RTL program with supporting research. This PPT is included on the second of two CDs and is designed to introduce teachers and administrators to the RTL program.
5. Ten RTL posters to remind students of key ideas are also included on the second CD.
6. Parents education newsletters, that offer parents suggested activities to do at home with their child. The activities reinforce the main ideas and skills presented in the RTL programs.

Leader Qualifications and Training

It is encouraged that leaders (teachers and school counselors) be trained in the RTL model. One of the more important aspects of the model is the leader's own modeling of the skills. The greater understanding the leader has of the theory and practice of the skills being taught, the more effective the leader is in presenting and modeling these skills to children. The Teacher's Manual has been structured to provide maximum support and assistance to the teacher/counselor, and to accommodate group leaders with a minimum of training. One day RTL teacher/counselor training workshops are available. Contact Atlantic Education Consultants at SSSAEC@aol.com for workshop information.

Familiarizing Yourself with the RTL Model

In order to use the RTL program effectively, we recommend that before attempting to lead the lessons, that you read the Teacher's Manual, and all five stories. In addition, it may be helpful to listen to the recorded stories as you plan how to read the stories aloud to the children. Ask yourself the following questions to determine your readiness for leading the activities: