# Reading with TLC

**Information Packet**

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Reading with TLC

Reading with TLC offers research-based, clinically proven methods and materials, and provides professional development opportunities for those training phonemic awareness, phonics, speech production, and sight word acquisition. Comprised of *Lively Letters* and *Sight Words You Can See*, Reading with TLC is utilized in all three tiers of the Response to Intervention model of instruction. This creative program is used throughout the U.S., and globally, as an important part of, or supplement to, the core reading curriculum in grades Pre-K - 2. It is also used as an intervention program for students of all ages, including teenagers and adults. The explicit, multisensory approach is effective with all types of learners and addresses the needs of students with various learning challenges, including students with reading disabilities, speech and language disorders, and memory weaknesses. It is also successfully used with those learning English as a second language. The methods and materials consistently yield quick, dramatic gains in the critical skills for reading and spelling, while the fun factor makes it an enjoyable experience for students and teachers alike.

Reading Skills Covered
There are five skill areas that are considered the essential pieces of a balanced literacy program. These important skill areas are phonemic (sound) awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The Reading with TLC programs develop phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word skills to the level of automaticity, which enhances students’ progress in the remaining, higher leveled skill areas. Reading with TLC is designed to improve reading skills through the use of two multisensory, language-based programs that use imagery and mnemonics, or memory cues, to facilitate learning. These two unique programs are *Lively Letters* and *Sight Words You Can See*.

Lively Letters, by Nancy Telian, MS, CCC-SLP, simultaneously trains phonemic awareness, speech production, and phonics skills. This program turns abstract letters and sounds into “lively” characters by embedding letters into colorful pictures that show students what to do with their mouths when making the sounds. Engaging music, pictures, hand/body cues, oral kinesthetic cues, and mnemonic stories are key features of this powerful, yet fun, program. Students systematically progress from learning isolated letter sounds with picture cues to reading and spelling multisyllable words in books and on paper.

Sight Words You Can See, by Penny Castagnozzi, builds on and uses their strong phonics base, adding humorous stories and mnemonic pictures drawn into sight words that don't follow the regular rules of phonics, such as “what,” “have,” and “come.” It has been hailed by teachers whose students are finally able to learn their sight words, reading more fluently and moving from controlled, phonetically decodable text to higher leveled literature.

Response to Intervention (RtI)
Using the Reading with TLC materials and techniques in all three tiers of instruction in the Response to Intervention model, school systems are consistently reporting tremendous improvements in curriculum-based measures and standardized tests of reading and spelling. When used in the Response to Intervention model of instruction, schools implementing the program have reported a decrease in the number of students needing to be referred for intervention or special education services.

Research-based and Clinically-proven
The products and techniques of Reading with TLC were established through extensive clinical trials, with hundreds of students, in response to research in the area of reading. Ongoing clinical studies consistently show dramatic gains within short periods of instruction. Typical gains, clinical studies, and supportive research are included later in this document.

Students Who Benefit from Reading with TLC
While the Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See programs are recognized for quickly developing the phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word skills of regularly achieving students, these programs were designed to target students who have, or are at risk for developing, reading disorders, including dyslexia. These unique programs benefit students with various learning disabilities, speech/language disorders, or developmental delays, as well as those who are learning English as a second language (ESL/ELL students).

The Reading with TLC programs are used preventively as a part of, or supplement to, the regular education core reading curriculum in grades Pre-K through 2, and as intervention programs for students of all ages. By implementing the programs in whole class lessons, flexible group instruction, and intensive, short term intervention for the more severely impaired students, a school system can empower its staff to improve students’ reading and spelling skills while reducing the overall numbers of special education referrals. The Reading with TLC programs provide engaging materials and structured teaching methods that span across grade levels within a school system, creating stability across the settings for teachers, as well as students. Children and adults who receive outside intervention at learning centers, hospitals, and clinics also benefit greatly from the specialized methods and materials of the programs.

**Differentiated Instruction**

Because Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See are multisensory approaches that incorporate imagery, hand and body cues, music, humorous stories, and mnemonics (memory tricks), students with different learning styles are able to use their strongest modes of learning to access and hold on to the information they need to acquire. The explicit programs are diagnostic and prescriptive, with a structured sequence of skill development that is flexible enough to accommodate students’ varied learning speeds. Even the most impaired students typically respond favorably to the methods and materials presented in the Reading with TLC programs. The flexibility of the programs also lends them to be easily combined with, or followed by, most other reading programs. Teachers are eager to include these programs in their differentiated instruction efforts because they see all of their students benefiting and the programs are easy to implement.

**People Implementing the Reading with TLC Programs**

Regular education teachers in grades Pre-K -2 are effectively incorporating the highly motivational programs in their classrooms. Special education teachers, reading specialists, speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, ELL teachers, and tutors are also using them in various settings, including schools, private practices, hospitals, learning centers, and universities, providing powerful intervention services that yield dramatic gains within short periods of instruction. Parents are also enthusiastically using this fun program at home to supplement services provided in school for their reading impaired children, or as a quick, easy way to teach phonics to their young children who are not experiencing learning difficulties.

**Professional Development**

While thousands have been purchasing the Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See programs and having great success implementing them without any official training in the programs, many have found it greatly beneficial to attend one of the Reading with TLC seminars, where participants receive direct instruction, hands-on practice, and specialized attention. As well as sponsoring offsite Reading with TLC seminars that are open admission for all who wish to attend, the program authors and TLC National Trainers are available to present on-site seminars for school districts or organizations that want to bring TLC trainers to them. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Lively Letters program, Reading with TLC began offering (and continues to offer) free professional development for groups of 100 or more. Along with presenting on-site and off-site seminars, the authors of the program speak often at national and state level conventions. These include the
American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA) national convention, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) national convention, and state branches of both of these organizations. Sessions at these conventions include not only information and techniques included in the Reading with TLC programs, but also other popular topics related to literacy, language, and education.

Webinars and online video-based trainings have also recently been added to the formats of professional development workshops offered by Reading with TLC.

Continuing education credits are awarded for all Reading with TLC presentations, and ASHA CEUs are offered for most of the seminars hosted by Reading with TLC.

Reading with TLC seminar choices include:

- Reading with TLC, Parts 1 and 2 – Full Training – 10 hours (2 days)  
  1.0 ASHA CEUs
- Reading with TLC, Condensed – Full Training – 6 hours (1 day) .6 ASHA CEUs
- Training of the TLC Trainers – 15 hours (3 days)
- Reading with TLC, Part 3 – Optional follow-up training with “make and take” – 5 hours (1 day)
- Preschool Lively Letters Training – 5 hours (1 day)
- Reading with TLC Overview – 1.5 hours
- Reading with TLC Overview for Parents – 1.5 hours

The Lively Letters Program
Training Letter Sounds and Phonics Skills
In the Lively Letters program oral kinesthetics, imagery, hand cues, music, and mnemonic stories are heavily utilized to make it easier for students to learn and remember their letter sounds. This is especially important for those with weaknesses in phonemic awareness, visual processing, and short term memory or rapid naming of visual symbols. Mnemonic cues are also instrumental in the Lively Letters approach to training many of the challenging phonics concepts, such as the final “e” rule (“note” VS “not”), vowel combinations (“ou” VS “oa”), and handling words with open syllables (“robot” VS “robbing”).

Training Phonemic Awareness
The picture cards and, later, plain letters are then used in hands-on manipulation activities (tracking) to develop the phonemic awareness skills of blending, segmenting, and sound manipulation. Students progress through the program, using various levels of words and materials to develop the ability to automatically sound out words for reading and spelling.

EXAMPLE – Handling “b” and “d” Confusion
It’s no wonder students have such difficulties not only telling these two letters apart, but then remembering which sound each letter represents. The letters look very similar, one usually being seen as just the mirror image of the other, and there is typically no easy way for students to hook the correct sound onto each of these abstract shapes. For many students with orthographic (visual), phonemic (sound) or rapid naming weaknesses, rote drill and practice are not enough.

With Lively Letters, the two letters are not just shapes, but unique, lively characters who have very different personalities. The stories about these two engaging characters can be best told through the suggested dialogue that is included in the Lively Letters Instruction Manual and displayed below. Keep in mind that the “b” would be presented after introducing its partner, “p,” and the “d” would be presented after introducing its partner, “t.”

**p – Quiet Lip Puffing Sound**
“What are we doing when we make this sound? ‘p’ (Produce sound, over-exaggerating the bursting action of the lips, keeping voice off.) We’re using our lips – we put them together. Put your hand in front of your mouth. Do you feel air coming out? Does it come out slowly, or is it puffing out? Right, it’s puffing out! We could call this a lip puffing sound. Is your voice on or off? Oh, this must be a quiet sound. (Show picture.)
The first thing I see in this letter is the line with the lips, telling me to put my lips together. The circle is at the top to remind us of the tall mother who’s always very quiet so her baby can sleep. We keep our voices off.”
*Hand cue: Hold fingers up to closed lips and quickly move them away.*

**b – Noisy Lip Puffing Sound**
“Did you know that the letter p has a noisy partner? We still put our lips together and puff out the air, but this time we turn our voices on while we do it. Let’s try it, and see what sound it makes! (Point to lips, turn on voice, and slowly start to form the sound ‘b’ with a loud voice, trying to elicit the same sound from the student.) See how your voice is on with that sound? (Show picture.) The line with the closed lips still comes first, so as soon as you see that, put your lips together! See how this circle is down low, though? This is the little baby, and babies are very noisy, aren’t they? That reminds us to turn our voices on!”
*Hand cue: Hold fingers up to closed lips and quickly move them away, with more force.*
t – Quiet Tongue Dancing Sound
“What am I doing when I make this sound? ‘t’ That’s right! I’m using my tongue! What is it doing? (Instructor makes quiet tapping sounds with tongue, ‘t-t-t-t,’ while lightly tapping fingernails on desktop as if tap-dancing.) It sounds like my tongue is tapping, dancing up there behind my teeth, doesn’t it? We can call this the tongue dancing sound. Let’s see if our voices are on or off. Oh, it’s the quiet tongue dancing sound! (Introduce picture.) This tongue is quietly dancing on the top of the mouth right behind the teeth. See how he keeps his arms out for balance while he quietly dances? He has sneakers on so he won’t make much noise. I wonder who his noisy partner is!”
*Hand cue: Tap fingers or fingernails quietly on the table.*

d – Noisy Tongue Dancing Sound
“Did you know that t has a noisy partner? You’re still going to tap your tongue up there, but this time, put your voice on. What sound does it make? ‘d-d-d-d’ (Tap on table noisily.) (Show picture.) This is our noisy tongue dancing sound. He’s still a tongue that’s tapping up there, but he likes to make a lot of noise! (Tap your fingers noisily on the table.) The first thing you see when you look at this guy is his very big tummy, which he likes to tap on like it’s a noisy drum – ‘d-d-d-d!’ When you see that circle first, tap on it like a noisy drum. ‘d-d-d-d’”
*Hand cue: Tap loudly on the table as if banging on a drum.*
The Sight Words You Can See Program

Sight words are the most frequently used words in print, making up 50-75% of the words on the page in most books, magazines, and newspapers. Without learning to recognize these words quickly and automatically by sight, we would need to spend much more time and energy sounding out every word we came upon, making reading an exhausting and frustrating task!

The typical approach to teaching students sight words is rote drill, using the sight words as flash cards for students to simply memorize. For some students, this technique is sufficient. For others, especially those with poor phonics skills, visual processing problems, or short term memory weaknesses, it is an impossibly difficult challenge.

The Sight Words You Can See program was designed with those struggling students in mind. In the early 1990’s, students were making dramatic improvements in their phonemic awareness and phonics skills through the use of the Lively Letters program, typically coming out of their short term intervention services testing out well above grade level in phonetic decoding (sounding out words). Unfortunately, their reading successes were not as dramatic when reading books that were not phonetically controlled, those filled with sight words that didn’t follow the rules of phonics. Words such as “want,” “was,” “to,” and “what” were not phonetically decodable and even students with great phonics skills were still struggling in their classrooms.

Sight words can typically be partially decoded phonetically, so a strong phonics base does greatly help students to read parts of the words, but there needed to be a way for students to remember the irregular spelling patterns of these tricky words. They needed a way to link the way a word is printed to the way it should be pronounced, and even better, to its meaning.

In 1994, Penny Castagnozzi began developing a very unique approach to teaching sight words. Seeing how well students responded to the mnemonic cues in the Lively Letters program, she began drawing mnemonic cues in and around the most difficult sight words from the Dolch sight word list – those abstract words that are phonetically irregular or have infrequent spelling patterns. The mnemonic cues link all three aspects of the sight words – the way they’re spelled, the way they’re pronounced, and their meanings. The line drawings are just enough to elicit the humorous mnemonic cues without distracting the students from the letter patterns in the sight words.

Sight Words You Can See was published in 1996, and has since been used successfully to develop students' sight word banks, improving oral reading fluency and allowing students to concentrate less on decoding words and more on reading comprehension vocabulary. Having a more expansive sight word bank also makes reading easier and more enjoyable for students, making them more likely to continue developing all of their reading skills! One of the extra benefits of learning sight words through the Sight Words You Can See program is the ease with which students learn to also spell these most frequently misspelled words! For this reason, many schools are including this program as part of their regular spelling curriculum.

It is recommended that Sight Words You Can See be used after a student has developed a strong phonics base, as it is important to know the rules of phonics to understand how some words don’t follow those rules. Students will also be using their phonics skills to decode the phonetically regular parts of these words. Depending on a students’ learning strengths and weaknesses, it could take anywhere from a few weeks to several months to go through all of the sight words in this program. Some teachers, tutors, and parents use the program for a short period of time every day, while others choose to teach a set of twelve words each week or every other week.

There are 84 words covered by the program, but considering word families (for “all” there is “ball, hall,…”) and the number of words that contain the sight words (for “right” there is “rightful, righteous, fright, frighten,…”) the number of words a student will more easily recognize is increased exponentially.

Typical Gains
For years students have benefitted greatly from the Lively Letters program (created in 1990) and Sight Words You Can See program (created in 1996) that make up Reading with TLC. Although each case is unique, students trained with the Lively Letters methods and materials typically show improvements of 1.5 to 3 grade levels in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonetic decoding, and oral reading within several months. When the program is implemented intensively (four to five times per week in 45 minute, small group sessions) these gains are seen within six to eight weeks, as was reported in the Boston Public Schools Initial Pilot Study highlighted in the clinical studies section of this website. Given intervention using the Lively Letters program, dramatic improvement is usually apparent after the first few weeks. The introduction of Sight Words You Can See results in more fluent reading and enables students to go beyond phonetically controlled books, improving oral reading scores.

Older students typically make greater gains than the averages stated above. In many cases older students who have significant reading disabilities pre-test at the late second grade level when tested on pure phonics skills (reading nonsense words) even though they may be able to read functionally at the 5th or 6th grade level due to sight word recognition. These students often soar after being introduced to the Lively Letters program, significantly increasing phonemic awareness skills, and often raising phonetic decoding skills by 8 to 10 years in a matter of months.

Students with varied types of learning challenges respond well to the program. Although cognitively delayed students may need longer and more intensive periods of instruction, they typically make great gains due to the powerful mnemonics and unique intersensory techniques. English Language Learners, those learning English as a second language, respond extremely well to the oral and visual cues, the program helping them not only with phonics and phonemic awareness, but correct articulation of the letter sounds. Students with speech and language disorders, in particular those with speech production problems, respond well to the Lively Letters clinical techniques that enhance the ability to correctly articulate the speech sounds. The strategies also decrease sequencing errors while sounding out words, particularly words with consonant blends and multisyllable words.
Clinical Studies of the Lively Letters Program

INITIAL LIVELY LETTERS PILOT STUDY IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS - BOSTON, MA 1992 - 1996

After two years of developing and fine-tuning the Lively Letters program and seeing dramatic positive gains, the initial Lively Letters pilot study was conducted in the Boston Public Schools from 1992 – 1996. In this study, 170 reading delayed/impaired students in grades K–5 (including ELL, cognitively delayed, and students with speech/language vision, and hearing impairments,) received intervention in a cyclical, intensive therapy program, specifically the “Lively Letters” application. The sessions were approximately 45 minutes in length, with each student receiving an average of 30 sessions over a period of 6-8 weeks in small groups of 2-4 students. In many cases, one of the small group lessons per week was replaced with a whole class lesson. Several of the most severely challenged students were seen individually for 30 minutes per day. Those providing instruction included the two TLC authors and consultants trained by them.

Researchers examined three areas in the students’ development: phonemic awareness, phonetic decoding, and oral reading. In the area of phonemic awareness, as tested by the Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test (LAC), these 170 students increased their reading skills by an average of 2.1 grade levels. Phonetic decoding (reading nonsense words) was a second area examined, and among 74 students tested by the “Word Attack” subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests between 1994 and 1996, there was a mean increase of 2.0 grade levels. Before using the 1994, the 96 students were tested with an informal nonsense word decoding task with positive results (which are not reflected in this chart). A third area examined was oral reading, as tested by the “Oral Reading” subtest of the Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills. Among 168 students tested (2 were not available for testing), there was an average increase in 1.5 grade levels in oral reading skills.

Boston Public Schools 1992 - 1996

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<th>Average Grade Level Gains</th>
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<td>After an average of 30 sessions (6 to 8 weeks) of small group intervention, with several more severely impaired students seen individually.</td>
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<th>Average LAC Test Gains for Specific Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5 students</td>
<td>4.0 grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 students</td>
<td>3.1 grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 students</td>
<td>2.3 grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL/ESL students</td>
<td>2.75 grade levels</td>
</tr>
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Oral Reading
Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills “Oral Reading”

Word Attack
Woodcock Reading Mastery “Word Attack”

Phonemic Awareness
LAC - Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test
The pilot study represented by the graph was conducted in Pittsfield, MA, 1999-2000. In this study of 16 at-risk / reading-delayed kindergarten students, several indicators were measured using timed subtests from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Test (DIBELS). The DIBELS subtests included “Letter Identification” (average number of letters named in one minute), “Phoneme Segmentation” (number of phonemes produced in one minute after hearing spoken words), and “Nonsense Words” (average number of phonemes read within nonsense words within one minute. Among the kindergarteners receiving intervention instruction with the Reading with TLC program, Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See, letter identification increased from 0 in the pre-test, to an average of 30 letters named correctly in one minute. Phoneme segmentation increased from 3 to 40 produced in one minute after hearing the spoken word, and there was an increase in number of phonemes read in one minute from 17 before instruction, to 25 in the post-test.

During that year, at risk / reading impaired students in grade one were also followed. Among the 1st graders who received intervention instruction with the Reading with TLC programs four times per week throughout the school year, the number of phonemes read within nonsense words in one minute increased from 12 to 40, and the average number of words read correctly increased from 23 to 71 words per minute (using 1st grade curriculum reading materials).
Overview of York County Pilot Studies Response to Intervention (RTI) Model

Kindergarten and first grade students from a school in Maine received combined instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics using the Lively Letters program at various levels of instruction as an integral part of the core reading program and as the intervention program. During the years that this Lively Letters program was utilized, it was the only phonemic awareness and phonics program being implemented with students. Progress monitoring, direct service, consults, and in-service training conducted by the speech pathologist were integral to the success of the program. Results gathered over a two year period using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) were analyzed in regard to the percentage of students who had at-risk and deficient scores on timed tests of phonemic awareness and phonics. These quick assessments, measuring critical early skills for reading, such as phoneme segmentation and nonsense word decoding, have been shown to be highly predictive of later reading success or failure.

The data demonstrates that the overall numbers of students scoring in the at-risk and deficient ranges significantly decreased, following the use of the Lively Letters program within each tier of a Response to Intervention model. Students needing Tier Two instruction in kindergarten received push-in services while students in first grade received pull-out services. Tier Two instruction was sufficient for most at-risk or struggling students, who were serviced in small groups. A very limited number of students required Tier Three instruction which involved individual services. The data also indicates that when classrooms delivered this type of instruction in kindergarten and first grade, substantially fewer students required Tier Two or Tier Three special education or remedial services upon entering second grade.

Logistics of RTI Implementation of Lively Letters Program in York County, Maine (as reported by the SLP conducting the study)

Tier 1

- Lively Letters was the only phonics and phonemic awareness program used along with Guided Reading
- SLP provided a “push-in coaching” model
- Teacher learned to “think like a reading specialist”

Tier 2 - Reading specialist did “pull-out” Tier 2 instruction for “at-risk” students 5 times/week.

Tier 3 - In 2007-2008 school year, only 1 child needed Tier 3 instruction

Monitoring Progress

- Teacher progress monitored the “let’s watch” students in Tier 1
- Reading specialist progress monitored the Tier 2 kids once per week
- Everyone helped out with the benchmark testing three times per year
RESULTS - YORK COUNTY, ME - DIBELS DATA
DYNAMIC INDICATORS OF BASIC LITERACY SKILLS

Program Implemented: Lively Letters

SOUND BLENDING/PHONICS
“Nonsense Word Fluency”
1st Grade Class
Gains Made
Fall 2007 – Spring 2008

Fall 2007
58% “established” level
18% “deficit” level

Spring 2008
90% “established” level
1% “deficit” level

SOUND SEGMENTATION
“Phoneme Seg. Fluency”
1st Grade Class
Gains Made
Fall 2006 – Spring 2007

Fall 2006
27% “established” level
19% “deficit” level

May 2007
82% “established” level
1% “deficit” level
RESULTS - YORK COUNTY, ME - DIBELS DATA
DYNAMIC INDICATORS OF BASIC LITERACY SKILLS

Program Implemented: Lively Letters

SOUND SEGMENTATION
“Phoneme Seg. Fluency”

Comparison of
Two Years’ Classes
upon Entering 1st Grade
Fall 2006 and Fall 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Students entering 1st grade</th>
<th>Students entering 1st grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WITHOUT Lively Letters</td>
<td>HAVING HAD Lively Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2006</td>
<td>26% at “established” level</td>
<td>52% at “established” level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20% at “deficit” level</td>
<td>4% at “deficit” level</td>
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RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION WITH HIGH ELL POPULATION
CLARK COUNTY, LAS VEGAS, NV 2008 – 2009

Services delivered and data reported by
Rex Bell Elementary School Speech Language Pathologist, Bonnie Lamping, MA, CCC-SLP

Lively Letters in High ELL, Special Ed. Kindergarten Classroom (August 2008 – June 2009) This is preliminary data from the Rex Bell School in the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada, with students in the Special Education Kindergarten Classroom. The demographics for this school system include 85% of students with free lunch and 75% of students that are ELL (English Language Learners, English not being the native language of these students). The speech pathologist was utilizing the “push-in” service model (providing services in the classroom) 3 times per week, for 50 minutes. Whole classroom lessons were implemented, as well as small group reinforcement, as needed. The Lively Letters program was used to teach letter sounds, with no other phonics or phonemic awareness program reportedly being used at the time with these students. The letter sounds taught within this period of time included all single consonants and short vowels of the program, as well as the digraphs, sh, th, and ch.

Results:
The interim progress monitoring assessments were given approximately every month starting with a baseline in Aug of 2008. Median scores of all the students in the class at pre-test indicated that the students only knew 20% of upper case letter names, 18% of lower case letter names and 0% of the letter sounds. The assessment around winter break indicated that the class as a whole mastered 91% of upper case letter names, 74% of lower case letter names and 87% of their letter sounds. At the end of the school year the class had mastered 95% of upper case letter names, 80% of the lower case letter names, and 100% of their letter sounds.

Lively Letters in RTI Model
High ELL, Special Education Kindergarten Classroom
Clark County, Las Vegas (August 2008 – June 2009)
Lively Letters with Six Most Severely Delayed Students in First Grade Classroom
May – June 2009

In a first grade classroom at Rex Bell Elementary School in Las Vegas, Nevada, the speech/language pathologist provided Lively Letters instruction in a large group (26 students) 2-3 times per week for 40 minutes over a period of three months (April 09 – June 09). Even the most severely delayed students in the classroom made tremendous gains in letter sound ID in the three months of instruction, as shown in the graph below. One of the students in the group (Student-6) was not only ELL, but had just recently come from Mexico and spoke NO ENGLISH at all when starting instruction with the Lively Letters program to learn the English letter sounds.

Lively Letters in RTI Model – Letter Sound ID
Most Severely Delayed Students in First Grade Classroom
Clark County, Las Vegas (2009)

*Student-6 Spoke no English at all when starting Lively Letters program to learn English letter sounds (was absent at time of mid-test)
Testimonials of the Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See programs:

“I continue to be amazed with the effectiveness of the program despite the severity of the disorders.”
Linda B. - SLP in Monroe, LA

“My kindergarteners love the letter/word work of TLC! They adore the Lively Letters music and songs! With sparkling eyes and a heart bursting with pride, Alexander states, ‘That’s the fire breathing dragon!’ Ali hardly ever speaks, but now he knows almost all his letters and sounds! He can express himself through his kindergarten writing. Polly can now say ‘three’ instead of ‘free.’ Ashley says the sound when she sees or writes most letters, and it is fantastic! Pedro can say ‘rabbit’ instead of ‘wabbit.’ His mom is thrilled. Ben cried when the substitute did not play the ‘i’ song. I have been teaching for eighteen years. I have had phone conversations with you, and have felt the sincerity of what you wish to bring to primary students. Thank you.”
Jennifer Cucolo - K teacher in Scarsdale, NY

“Being a dyslexic myself, I wish these cards were presented to me when learning the confusing vowel sounds. My students and I really connect to these cards. Thank you so much.”
Laurie in Holbrook, MA

“I can finally teach phonics in a fun and interesting way!”
Terri – teacher in Sanborn, NH

“Recently I was introduced to this program and it has changed my perception of how to teach reading. I have only used this for two months and my students are making HUGE strides in that time.”
Morgan - Title I Paraprofessional

“As a speech pathologist, the more I think about it, the more this makes sense. I really like the fact that it can be used with a wide range of students: those with memory, cognitive, language deficits, and many more.”
Sharon – SLP in NH

“This is the best program I’ve seen on phonics in 34 years of teaching (18 years in kindergarten).”
Ray - teacher in AWRS District

“First time I have felt ALL kinds of learners will be engaged as phonics is taught!”
Anne - Special Education Teacher in Rhode Island

“I am so excited that classroom teachers, reading teachers, and SPED teachers are all talking the same language with this program!”
Diane - Reading Teacher in Massachusetts

“FINALLY- this is something that is so concrete and still flexible, and it is so much fun to use!”
Pam - First Grade Teacher in Connecticut

“My son, now 17 and a phenomenal, avid reader, used your system to learn his letters. Full letter immersion at his pre-school and elementary school in (our town) didn’t ‘stick’ until we went to Bonnie Singer, a speech language pathologist, who used Lively Letters.

My son is very bright, we had no clues in pre-school that he didn’t recognize his letters. He wrote his name and things so we thought it was all fine. I asked him what a letter in his name was, assuming he knew, and he had NO idea. He couldn’t decipher the lines and circles from one another. We tried everything. We were directed to Bonnie Singer and within 16 hours with Lively Letters he knew his letters, the sounds they made and blends. With more help he had the sight words, etc. Honestly, he reads all the time now, and has a good memory for what he’s read - but he just needed to unlock the letters. The world of words opened and has stayed open.

Thanks again. What you’ve created is a big deal in making the world a more educated place...”
Elizabeth Herriman, a parent writing from Switzerland
A recent email (from an administrator) about the Reading with TLC program and her on-site training:

"I have been in charge of Professional Development for our district for four years and involved at the district level for seven years and we have never received such universal and across the board positive feedback for any other offering. Participants overwhelmingly felt that they could walk away with information that they could start using immediately. The presentation itself was delightfully engaging and participant feedback indicated that they would highly recommend this workshop to others. We have had several SLPs express interest in attending additional training. Those who have implemented the program are so excited about the positive results they are seeing.

One of the SLPs has started an afterschool program on her own time to help students because she's so enthused about the results she's seeing and wants to help even more kids that she can't get to during the regular school day.

Another of my SLPs just told me yesterday that she worked with her kindergarten son over the winter break (she went in October) and when they came back from break his teacher was astounded by his sudden ability to read, so she is now using Lively Letters with her class.

While it's understood that you want to promote your products, it's clear that you are passionate about the information getting out there and are willing to share it without being "pushy," trying to sell. As a result, and because the products are wonderful, they sell themselves. I'm sharing this with you because we had an SLP come to us and ask us to bring you here after seeing your presentation at FLASHA, but the district team was hesitant because a previous experience with another company was so negative. After seeing the presentation myself at FLASHA, I felt much better and made the request - and am so glad we did.

Please feel free to give my contact information if anyone wants to contact me directly. I would be happy to share how wonderful your presentation was."

Eileen H. Petersen, M.S., CCC-SLP
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About the Authors

Nancy Alemian Telian, MS, CCC-SLP, and Penny Alemian Castagnozzi are the creators and co-directors of Reading with TLC. Together they continue to create clinically tested and research-based materials and techniques for the development of critical skills for reading and spelling. They have presented their professional training workshops to thousands of educators and clinicians within the U.S., not only providing workshops in the Reading with TLC approach, but also as invited speakers at national and state level conventions. Because of their commitment, passion, and ability to relate personally with their workshop audiences, Penny Castagnozzi and Nancy Telian have become highly recognized in the educational community as dynamic and motivating speakers.

Nancy Telian is the author of the Lively Letters program, which trains the acquisition of phonemic awareness and phonics skills. As an ASHA certified speech and language pathologist who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of reading disorders, Nancy maintains a private practice in Weymouth, MA. She is an adjunct faculty member at Boston’s prestigious MGH Institute of Health Professions Graduate Program in Communication Sciences and Disorders, where she has served as a clinical supervisor. Nancy was involved in the Massachusetts Department of Education Bay State Reading Initiative, having served as a reviewer of the teacher training modules for phonemic awareness and phonics. She was also a master teacher trainer for the Massachusetts Department of Education Teacher Training Institutes under the Reading First Grant and the No Child Left Behind Act. Nancy is currently the editor of the Massachusetts Speech Language Hearing Association quarterly newsletter, The Voice. Also an accomplished pianist, Nancy composed and performed the music for the Lively Letters Character Songs, and is the composer and performer of the piano CD, From Dream to Reality.

Penny Castagnozzi, who has a background in elementary education, has been a specialist in the development and implementation of the Reading with TLC programs since 1991. She has provided reading therapy in both the public school setting and in the private practice that she currently maintains in Weymouth, MA. As well as speaking on the topics of reading disorders and educational strategies for improving literacy, Penny has been a repeat motivational speaker at national sales conventions in Dallas, Texas. She is the creator of the Sight Words You Can See program, which trains the acquisition of phonetically irregular sight words, and is the author of several educational books, including the highly popular Lively Letters Character Poem Book and Let’s Practice Reading with TLC, and was instrumental in revising the Lively Letters program. A singer/songwriter since her teens, Penny was the lyricist and one of the singers for the Lively Letters Character Songs CD. Also a writer of children’s literature, Penny is the author of Wedding Time for Emmie and Jake, A Roomful of Rainbows, and Sight Words Stories You Can Read.
Supportive Research

Below is a summary of some of the most conclusive findings documented from over 40 years of research, including those analyzed by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development and research results listed in the report of the National Reading Panel. The authors of the Reading with TLC programs having kept abreast of this research in the field of reading, and have developed and modified their methods and materials based upon these findings, as well as the results of the clinical studies.

A Balanced Approach to Literacy and the Importance of Phonics

Research has shown that phonics and meaning-based reading instruction should both be incorporated in the classroom, and that the ultimate goal of any reading program is reading comprehension. In order to adequately comprehend (fully understand) what is being read, however, students must be able to efficiently identify the printed words on the page. Fast, accurate decoding (reading) of single words has been found to account for a large share of the differences in students’ abilities to understand what they are reading.

The English language is an alphabetic system, meaning that printed words are composed of letters and letter patterns that represent spoken sounds. For individuals struggling with poor phonological (sound) processing skills, the alphabetic principle (phonics) must be systematically and explicitly taught. It is clear from the research that, for beginning and struggling readers especially, multisensory, language-based, systematic, and explicit approaches to reading are more effective than whole word approaches.

Research tells us that, due to the ultimate importance of mastering the alphabetic system, early learners should be given preventive, research-based phonics instruction, and early intervention if needed, in the regular education classrooms in Kindergarten, first and second grades. For students who are at risk for, or already experiencing, reading difficulties, intervention services should be provided as early as possible, and intensively enough to ensure success. The number of days per week and the number of students in the instructional group should be based upon the severity of the problem, as well as the results of ongoing progress monitoring.

Response to Intervention

“Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Student progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both.” (RTI Action Network) Below is a common way research based reading instruction is delivered in what is referred to as the “Three-Tier” model of RTI instruction.

**Tier I**
When implemented as part of the core curriculum in Tier I within the classroom, 80 - 90% of the students in the classroom should be able to perform adequately, without additional services. Tier I students typically receive 90 minutes of research-based reading instruction per day, that instruction being differentiated to meet students’ varied needs. On a periodic basis throughout the year, all students are given benchmark testing on predictive tests assessing critical skill areas.

**Tier II**
Those students not making adequate progress in the core curriculum used in Tier I are provided with more intensive instruction to meet their needs as determined by levels of performance and rates of progress. These students typically receive 30 additional minutes along with the traditional 90. As well as longer periods of instruction, supplemental intervention programs are often implemented for Tier II instruction. Predictive tests assessing critical skill areas determine the adequacy of the instruction intensity and reflect whether or not the methods and materials are effective enough.

**Tier III**
Typically, for 1-5% of students in the classroom, Tier II instruction is not sufficient for the reader to reach benchmarks in the critical reading skills. Students who are still struggling after receiving Tier II instruction need individualized, intensive interventions that specifically address the students’ skill deficits to remediate existing weaknesses and prevent more severe problems. These students benefit from receiving 90 minutes of instructions with the class, plus an additional 60 minutes of intervention with research-based methods and materials to address his needs. More frequent progress monitoring is necessary to support the methods and intensity of the instruction being delivered.
When schools are reporting large numbers of students being referred for Tier II services (a percentage significantly larger than 10-20%) or larger numbers of students are being referred for Tier III services, it is seen as a major “red flag,” indicating that the core reading curriculum is not strong enough to effectively support and meet the varied needs of at least 80 to 90% of the students. With the appropriate research-based programs in place in Tier I, fewer students would require Tier II instruction, and even fewer would need the intensive, individualized instruction in Tier III.

**The Building Blocks of Literacy**

**Phonemic Awareness → Phonics → Fluency → Vocabulary → Comprehension**

With the understanding that the ultimate goal of reading is effective comprehension, research indicates that reading comprehension is typically reliant on mastering several underlying skill areas. It is obvious that vocabulary skills greatly influence comprehension. Also crucial for good comprehension, though, is the ability to read text automatically and fluently. Fluent readers quickly and accurately identify printed words based on their letters and letter patterns. Automatic word identification skills are generally dependent upon the ability to rapidly identify and name the sounds associated with the printed letters (phonics). Students must also have the ability to visually discriminate among, perceive, and identify letter shapes and patterns of several letters in sequence (orthographic awareness). Finally, in order to learn letter sound associations and continue building phonics skills, students must have developed strong phonological, and more specifically, phonemic awareness skills. Phonemic awareness is the ability to auditorily perceive, blend, segment, and manipulate the individual speech sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words. Reaching the goal of effective reading comprehension depends on the success in each of these skill areas.

**Three Critical Components – Phonemic Awareness, Orthographic Awareness, Rapid Naming**

Each of these three components obviously affects reading ability. Individuals having significant weaknesses in rapid naming of visual symbols, combined with difficulty in phonemic awareness and/or orthographic awareness often exhibit a significant reading disorder that requires intensive intervention.

**Phonemic Awareness**

The auditory skills of blending, segmenting (breaking words into individual sounds), and manipulating sounds, as well as perceiving the number and order of sounds within spoken words, are important phonemic awareness skills that are necessary for the development of phonics skills. Phonemic awareness is a skill that typically emerges along with the development of phonics skills. Unlike phonemic awareness, phonics involves print, and assumes the understanding that printed letters systematically represent sounds. We cannot link sounds to letters if we have trouble perceiving these individual sounds in spoken words, which is why phonemic awareness is essential for developing strong phonics skills. Transposing, omitting, adding, and substituting sounds while reading and speaking (and letters while spelling) can signify weak phonemic awareness skills. Although phonemic awareness is an auditory based skill, research has consistently shown that the most effective phonemic awareness intervention programs include letter sound instruction and use of letters in phonemic awareness activities. It has been shown that assessment of phonemic awareness predicts third grade reading failure with 92% accuracy.

**Orthographic Awareness**

Orthographic awareness, the ability to visually perceive the sequences and patterns of printed letters within words, is also essential for success in the alphabetic word attack strategies needed for reading and spelling. A student having difficulty distinguishing between two letters (“b” and “d,” for example), or perceiving and recalling the correct sequence within letter patterns in a printed word, is likely to have great difficulty when trying to read or spell words. This becomes especially apparent when students spell by sight memorization words with infrequent or irregular letter patterns, such as “right,” and “thought.” Individuals with weaknesses in this area also have particular difficulty remembering which letter patterns to use when spelling homophones, or words that are pronounced the same, but spelled differently, such as “sale” and “sail.”

**Rapid Naming**

A third area found to be critical to the reading process is the ability to rapidly name visual symbols. Difficulties in this area can be tested and documented as a weakness. One must be able to apply the sound and letter knowledge at a quick rate, rapidly articulating sounds and sound patterns while decoding printed words. Tests that target this area typically require students to name as quickly as they can visual symbols, such as pictures, colors, shapes, numbers, and letters. Students having extreme difficulty learning letter names and letter sounds may have weaknesses in this area.
**Effects of a Reading Disorder**

Reports from the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development found that 85% of special education referrals were coming in third grade and that 85% of those referrals were for reading. According to the National Association of Educational Progress, 37 percent of U.S. fourth graders fail to achieve basic levels of reading achievement, and the incidence of reading failure is even higher within low-income families, ethnic minority groups, and English-language learners. Children who learn to read easily, enjoy reading, and read more are exposed to more complex and varied vocabulary and exhibit greater comprehension. Children who struggle with reading, becoming frustrated and reading less, encounter fewer new words, make smaller gains in vocabulary, and understand less of what they read. This scenario, referred to as the “Matthew Effects,” demonstrates that, when it comes to reading skills, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (Stanovich, 1986). By the end of first grade, poor readers already demonstrate a significant drop in self-esteem and motivation to learn to read. Because of the decreased ability to read text, poor readers have difficulty learning other school subjects (science, history, etc.) and have decreased opportunities to develop complex, higher level language and cognitive skills. Poor readers also have decreased chances of attending college, and fewer employment opportunities are available.

**Prevention and Early Intervention**

Prevention and early intervention with research-based methods in grades Pre-K, 1, and 2 can, and do, decrease the numbers of special education referrals in schools. Research indicates that 90-95% of poor readers can increase reading skills to average levels, given early intervention that combines training in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. If this intervention is delayed until students are 9 years old, which is when many children have typically been referred throughout our nation, approximately 75% of these children will continue to have difficulties learning to read through high school.

**Recent Research Findings Related to Preschool and Early Literacy Development**

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) conducted a comprehensive review of the research in early childhood and the following findings were listed in the report published in 2008, entitled, The Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention 2008. The report found strong, positive, and statistically significant impacts of code-focused interventions (interventions focusing on letter name and some letter sound knowledge, along with phonemic awareness instruction) on young children’s skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, oral language, reading, and spelling.

- In preschool it is possible to affect substantially those skills that are most predictive of later decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling.
- Intervention on the predictive, critical skills at the preschool level has a positive effect on reading and spelling skills.
  - These substantial impacts are consistent regardless of children’s existing early literacy skills.
  - There is not a point along either an age or a developmental continuum at which code-focused interventions become more or less beneficial to children’s early literacy skills. There is no preexisting level of knowledge or skill that children must attain before these interventions can be used successfully.
  - Interventions should include phonemic awareness training with activities involving higher-level phonemic awareness skills, such as actively engaging in blending and segmenting of words at the syllable, onset-rime, or phoneme level with feedback on correct and incorrect responses.
  - Although phonemic awareness training can be conducted alone, the results suggest that there may be an advantage of combining such training with activities designed to teach children about specific aspects of print, such as letter names and letter sounds.
  - It is likely that, for some of the interventions, a small-group format will be necessary to achieve this level of positive results.
  - There is, at present, no interpretable evidence that teaching alphabetic knowledge alone is a sufficient technique for enhancing children’s reading-related skills.
  - Given the clear success of code-focused instruction with these mixed populations, it seems prudent to make such instruction available to all populations of young children, at least until research more directly addresses this question.

**Recent Research Related to English Language Learners (ELL)**
• Early concentration on teaching phoneme awareness and phonics can radically improve reading and spelling standards in inner city second-language learners. (Stuart, 1999)
• Oral language proficiency measures of English are poor predictors of subsequent reading performance.
• There is no need to wait until students have good oral proficiency in English before teaching reading.
• Although English language proficiency does play a strong role in discourse comprehension. Geva and Wade-Wooley (1998)
• For ELL students, as for native English language speakers, phonological processing measures are excellent predictors of potential at risk status.
• Phonological awareness transfers across languages. This may not, however, always be the case with word decoding abilities
• Researchers are not saying native language reading instruction is inappropriate, but that ELL students can learn to read in English from grades K to 1
• ELL students can perform in reading as well as their native English speaking peers at the end of first grade, if given appropriate instruction. (Gersten et al., 2005; Siegel and colleagues, Geva & colleagues)
• Phonological processing of ELL students can develop at an even higher performance level than their native English speaking peers.
• ELL students tend to attack sounds in a more strategic fashion, possibly because they have a heightened attention to sounds

Unique Features of the Reading with TLC programs Specifically Supported by the Research
• Although phonemic awareness is an auditory skill, research indicates that the training of phonemic awareness is more effective when letters are used in the process. (Oudeans, 2003), (National Reading Panel, 2000), (Bradley & Bryant, 1983)
• Research shows that students have an easier time learning letter sounds when letters are embedded into pictures. (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1991)
• Research indicates that students have an easier time learning letter sounds when oral kinesthetic information (mouth cues) is explicitly used. (Lindamood & Lindamood, 1975).
• Phonics and phonemic awareness programs that engage students with a “fun” factor are more likely to be used consistently by teachers and warrant more study as a promising instructional feature. (Report of the National Reading Panel)
• Numerous studies support the use of music when teaching children skills, including phonics and phonemic awareness, and the use of music was listed as a promising instructional feature of phonics programs that warrant more study. (Report of the National Reading Panel)

General Recommendations from the Research
• Include daily phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness activities, in the standard kindergarten curriculum.
• Begin teaching phonemic awareness directly at an early age (preschool and kindergarten).
• Teach each letter sound association explicitly, initially teaching the sound in isolation, and not embedded in a spoken word.
• Follow a structured, developmental sequence for teaching letter sounds.
• Systematically teach frequent, highly regular sound / spelling relationships before teaching the less common ones. For example, for the letter “a,” teach the sound /a/ as in “apple” before teaching the other, less common sounds of “a.”
• When training phonemic awareness, also teach letter sound knowledge and use letters in phonemic awareness training activities.
• Teach students explicitly how to sound out words.
• Use connected, decodable text for children to practice the sound / spelling relationships they have learned, as well as a limited number of sight words that have been systematically taught.
• Use interesting literature to develop language comprehension. Struggling readers benefit from having stories read aloud to them to build oral language skills
• In the classroom, include instruction in all of the five skill areas of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) while also providing explicit instruction and/or intervention in phonemic awareness and phonics for students struggling with these critical skill areas.
• Both types of instruction, phonics and meaning-based, should occur, but not necessarily within the same lesson. It is more important to balance than mix the approaches.
For continued success in reading development, create and maintain a high level of motivation for students through appropriate instruction methods and materials.

REFERENCES


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