

Between the Lines

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Motherhead, Inc.
&
ChildTrust Foundation
are proud to announce
the creation of the
Story Exploring Curriculum
August 2006

STORY Exploring

The Power of Storybooks

Laura Justice, Ph.D., a professor at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, came to the national office in June to share with national training staff how storybooks provide “scaffolding” that helps young children build their literacy skills. Dr. Justice discussed ways that children benefit from having storybooks read to them:¹

- It is a comfortable, familiar process.
- It supports social-relational processes.
- It accounts for a small but measurable portion of later reading achievement.
- Adult readers can make simple adjustments to accelerate early skills.

The key feature in all storybook reading is an intentional adult reader who grounds shared reading in a positive social-emotional climate.

What Parents Can Do

Before they enter school – really, before they even learn to crawl – the youngest children can get a head start on learning to read. The good news for parents is that researchers have outlined four specific ways parents can foster literacy development:²

- Reading a bedtime story or compiling a grocery list are examples of what researchers describe as “simple and direct transfer” of literacy skills.
- Reading a stop sign or the names of products on a grocery store shelf and involving the child are ways to engage in “functional literacy activities.”
- Parents who characterize reading as a source of enjoyment and encourage their children to read are sharing “enjoyment and engagement” practices.
- Singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes or engaging in conversation at meals are “linguistic and cognitive mechanisms” that promote literacy development.

Dr. Catherine Snow, a literacy scholar to the current revision of the Storysharing Handbook, chaired the National Research Council committee that compiled the report, which has become central to many early literacy initiatives. She is the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

¹ From “Scaffolding with Storybooks,” Laura Justice, Ph.D., presentation to Motherhead Inc., Raleigh, N.C., June 25, 2006.

² From “Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,” edited by Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns & Peg Griffin. © 1998 by the National Academy of Sciences.

The **Storysharing Handbook**, the heart of the award-winning Motherhead® curriculum for children, is growing up. Twenty years after its birth into the world of literacy training guides, the handbook is undergoing its first major revision – a two-year process – and changing its name. The curriculum, which was based on nine children’s books at its inception in 1987 and includes 127 titles today, will now be called **Story Exploring®**.

The updated handbook reflects the findings of new research into reading and early childhood education and follows federal guidelines for “emergent literacy” – the concept that literacy development begins at birth, long before children reach kindergarten or even preschool. **Story Exploring** is designed to help parents and early caregivers read to children in ways that will enhance comprehension, build vocabulary and help them translate spoken language to the written word. Readers ask open-ended questions about the story and invite children to retell it. They clarify words and sentences, and during the story they ask young listeners to predict what might happen next. The curriculum uses props, games, songs and other activities to make reading fun.

“Literacy is not a naturally occurring process,” said Motherhead President Nancye Gaj. “It’s not like developing the ability to walk. You have to be taught – you have to be imitating someone who is doing it.”

Parental involvement in literacy training has always been a Motherhead distinctive – and, says Gaj, “recent

research emphasizes the importance of the home literacy environment.” Accompanying each **Story Exploring** lesson is a take-home **Story Extender** that caregivers can send home with parents. **Story Extenders**, like the Plans they replace from the original curriculum, suggest specific activities to encourage literacy development at home.

The original Storysharing curriculum was based on research from the mid-1980s, when the buzzword was “reading readiness,” which theorized that children’s

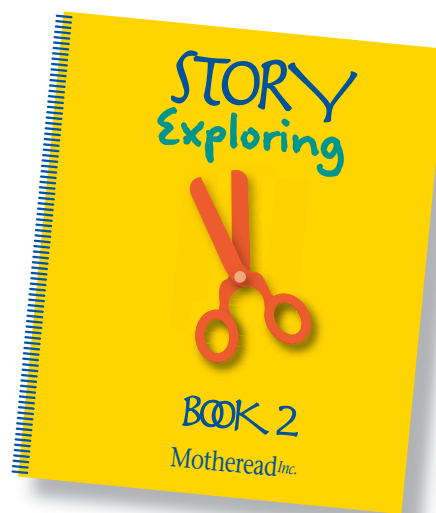
capacity for literacy remained in a holding pattern until they reached a certain stage of development. “We used the same model for children who were 2 as we did for children who were 11,” said Gaj.

By contrast, **Story Exploring** offers four levels. Book 1, for infants and toddlers, has been completed and is already in use. Book 2, for older pre-schoolers, was nearing completion at summer’s end. Book 3, for

children in grades K-2, and Book 4, for students in grades 3-5, are still in development.

Story Exploring adds two new features. **Having Fun with Language** promotes phonological awareness by using rhymes and songs to help children discriminate between sounds. **Writing What’s Said** helps children write down what they have heard.

For example, the Book 2 **Having Fun with Language** segment for Maurice Sendak’s classic story, “Where the Wild Things Are,” uses a familiar song to reinforce the story.



Using the tune for “Did You Ever See a Lassie?” it substitutes “wild thing” for “lassie” in the lyrics, so the children sing:

Did you ever see a wild thing,
A wild thing,
A wild thing?
Did you ever see a wild thing
Go this way and that...!”

For **Writing What’s Said**, the “Wild Things” lesson suggests that instructors let children suggest endings for the sentence, “If I were in charge of the wild things, I would...” and write a list of their ideas on chart paper.

Researchers Catherine Snow of Harvard and Laura Justice of the University of Virginia (see sidebars), both members of the **Story Exploring** scholar panel, were among the experts who reviewed the curriculum changes. The first training using the new **Story Exploring** materials will be Sept. 12-15 in Greensboro, N.C.

Despite the different name and updated design, the core curriculum will seem familiar to Motherhead veterans, said Program Director Carolyn Dickens. Trainers and students were asked to contribute ideas for the revision – and ideas for what to retain. “We wanted to make sure we kept what was good and built on what everyone loved.”



Learning Lessons from our Children's Literacy Initiatives

When a childcare instructor gathers a group of 3-year-olds for story time, often it's how she reads the book, not what book she chooses to read, that makes the difference between an eager audience and a bored bunch of toddlers.



Gorham

Interaction between the reader and her young audience – e.g., “what do you think happened next?” – and inviting the children to retell the story also foster comprehension.

For years, Motherhead staff members in Raleigh, N.C., have offered programs to help caregivers of young children become better at reading aloud. Literacy Invites and Nurtures Kids' Success – or L.I.N.K.S. – sent national office instructors into preschool and childcare classrooms over a period of months to work with teachers on becoming more effective readers. Between 1999 and 2005, 1,766 teachers and 10,777 children in Wake County participated in this mentoring and training initiative.

A separate initiative called Teacheread continues to provide instruction to groups of preschool teachers and childcare providers outside their classroom settings. Since 1999, 52 childcare professionals have participated in Teacheread classes at the national office in Raleigh.

Recent studies have demonstrated the success of both these initiatives. Dr. Bertha M. Gorham, then director of the Early Childhood

and Family Support program at RTI International, conducted a follow-up study of the L.I.N.K.S. process. She found that teachers who received Motherhead training improved their literacy practices in reading storybooks to preschoolers, regardless of the teacher's race, previous education or years of experience. In surveys after the L.I.N.K.S. training ended, 97 percent of caregivers said they knew more about emergent literacy for the ages of children they served. The same percentage reported that they were using their new knowledge and skills.

Meanwhile, a 2001 study showed that Teacheread participants increased their reading skills an average of 4.3 grade levels during the 16-hour course. That study used the reading subscale of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Participants were tested on the first and last days of class.



Machtinger

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According to Evelyn Machtinger, National Training Coordinator, the goal is to read to young children in a way that gets them “excited and enthralled, so they'll be engaged readers in school and then readers for a lifetime.”

Motherhead® Institute

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September 26 – 29, 2006
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October 10 – 13, 2006
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Newburyport, MA

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Seattle, WA

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October 5 – 6, 2006
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For more information
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For trainings in
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