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# PEP TALK

Parents and Educators Partner (PEP) and Talk

LLC Website: [www.longmirelearning.com](http://www.longmirelearning.com)

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## LLC is becoming popular...

We will entertain special visitors on April 16 & 17<sup>th</sup> that include B.J. Wise from Seattle, Washington, several Commissioners from the Alaska Department of Education, Marina B. Walne, Chair of the Governor's Business Council, & Chet Forraker, V.P., Sales & Marketing, Sopris West. They are coming to see our classroom management system & how we incorporate American Sign Language with language instruction. Their comments have been very interesting and typical of others who have yet to visit our school.

People cannot believe that we "keep" children in learning centers & "on task". That is so natural for our kids! They correct other children for making choices such as leaving their center or making a "less than desirable" choice. Our children "control" themselves in a planned & systematic environment... We "control" the choices and encourage children to take charge, make decisions & be accountable!

Public school teachers say they can identify a "Longmire kid" within 20 minutes on the first day of school because they are skillful, confident, & self-directed! Those are the skills that we work on: "how to learn" & "what to learn" & "how to think & plan". We want your child to develop good language skills & presentation of self & become a good leader!

## KEEPING YOU INFORMED

1 Ms. Vicki may have a "near" final production copy of the video by next week for your review. The kids, parents, & staff did great! We have some potential film stars! Thanks for your support on that project. Ms. Vicki has been & will be in Colorado completing final edits of the curriculum materials prior to press production deadlines this week.

2 LLC will be closed on March 29<sup>th</sup> for Good Friday. When you travel, please wear seatbelts at all times! Please make children wear the shoulder strap across their chest!

## What is so special about language arts instruction at LLC?

About this time every year, parents try to decide whether to send their children to public or private kindergarten next year. They ask what is different about our pre-kindergarten & kindergarten programs wanting to know why we produce such strong, skillful readers.

*Reading instruction begins with activities that develop language skills and prepares talkers whose vocabularies include deep word meanings that are essential for oral expression, then reading comprehension. We encourage talking and cooperative learning in small groups and centers.*

At LLC, language arts instruction is planned & individualized according to data from research and student assessments. We determine what they need. The way we teach & what we teach is why we produce excellent readers. We honor diversity of languages & cultures while introducing the codes of the English language & create a foundation for communication, reading, & writing.

LLC children leave our program with advanced, multi-lingual communication skills, specifically word meanings & phonemic awareness skills used to "decode or sound out" words. In fact, many of our 4 year old children blend sounds in ways that would be considered "emergent reading". When children share experiences that "fine tune" their listening comprehension skills & develop a "trained" ear to hear parts of spoken language, they identify sounds used in language & associate them with alphabet letters that graphically represent our written language.

Our instructional purpose is to provide fun activities that teach pre-skills that prepare kids for reading by building their "sound systems", vocabularies, & word knowledge. We are not teaching formal reading. We share books & discussions that help kids "see" print & associate meaningful understandings about what is said & read. Our kids learn to "hear it, see it, & say it" and understand it at the same time. Then instruction "makes sense".

They learn skills for task approach early because the instruction is "what we model" from age 2 years (by pointing to words as we read from left to right, talking about what sounds we hear at the beginning of a word, recognize the number of word parts or syllables, etc.). We are modeling "how to" organize & learn information.

## **Beware of assessment data that can be deceiving about children's needs...**

Several parents of children who have former LLC students now attending elementary grades are calling about their child's test scores, particularly in reading. They are trying to make placement decisions based on test scores that indicate their child is performing above grade level expectancy. Teachers are recommending special programs to provide more challenging curriculum.

It is common for children leaving LLC to score several grade levels above average & be recommended for special programs. These kids are "reading" above grade level using good phonetic skills to decode text that is above grade level expectancy. Because the skills at kindergarten & first grade are relatively easy, many kids excel above grade level initially. About second grade some kids that were "above average" appear to "flatten or plateau" as skills & text readability levels become more difficult & challenge the reader to read carefully & think deeply. This can be problematic when instruction becomes difficult too early. Kids need to enjoy reading fluently so they develop a desire to read for pleasure, not to satisfy academic requirements (as many of us learned).

Teachers & parents want to provide more difficult reading materials when assessments indicate these kids are excelling, but they are too young. They lack the life experiences to understand & respond correctly to "cause & effect:" questions. The kids develop poor reading habits like reading too quickly, reading carelessly & skipping words, & guessing meanings. In time, this lowers comprehension & becomes very frustrating for the kids & parents who thought they had "gifted" kids.

These young readers are "word calling" using great phonic skills & they comprehend because the readability level is so easy. They do not need more difficult text. They will benefit from reading more books with vocabulary word meanings & stories that are appropriate for their maturity level.

So my advice is "be careful & keep them where they are successful & feel confident so they develop the desire & maintain interests in reading". Extend skills using vocabularies. Write stories, illustrate books, & create plays or poetry. Let them enjoy developing more complex stories. They will build fluency (using skills with ease). Go "deeper & wider" ... develop deeper understandings & wider application of skills while fluently processing text.

They acquire organizational planning skills that establish "how to" use language to communicate clearly by using naming, describing, & action words. This is modeled while reading, singing, & signing. The children think it is play. There is no formal paper & pencil instruction nor drill & kill & no worksheets. The activities are oral, not written initially!

Our children discover how "cool" it is to learn & they develop a desire to read. AND...we have parents who talk & read with them! That encourages their desires to want to read & write. So, LLC children read earlier because they have the desire & the tools to "decode" or sound out words. Also, the level of difficulty of text at this point is relatively easy. The words (cat, rat) are easy to read. Progress is quick & successful.

Children with excellent "sound systems & phonetic instruction" tools can "read" by breaking words into sound parts. They appear to be "reading", but really they are "sounding"...the pre-requisite step to reading. We are not interested in promoting fluent reading at this time for young children unless all text they see has controlled vocabulary (contains words that follow predictable sound patterns). Otherwise, children see words that cannot be sounded out (have, where) & compensate for what they do not know by skipping words, reading what they can, & guessing the meaning.

They guess & infer meaning using pictures which develops bad habits for reading when the text difficulty becomes more challenging to understand. Many of us read that way. We skip words that we stumble over & guess the meaning. Please encourage attending to print, not pictures, & build oral language skills, then reading. Good readers process words by sounds to get meaning from print.

There are words that cannot be sounded out because they do not follow the typical patterns of vowels (short and long vowel sounds, etc.). We call them irregular words. Many words that appear frequently in text are irregular (where, there, their, was, etc.) Because they are "high frequency" words needed to make sentences & communicate, we teach them in "connected text". We connect them in sentences with words kids can decode, i.e. "Where is the big orange hat?". The words "orange & where" are used with words that kids recognize ( is, big). Repeated practice makes these words become sight words, or words that are recognized by sight & processed quickly.

"Whole word" instruction is used with phonics. Many decodable words (that, this) are presented as a whole, not sounded out. The words can be decoded by "sound" but are too hard initially for emergent readers to decode. They contain blends (th, bl) so they are presented in connected text with repeated practice opportunities, i.e. "That is a fat black cat".

Some words are irregular & must be presented as whole words because they cannot be decoded by sounds. Both kinds of instruction are used with repeated practice until they become "sight words" or words that are automatically recognized. This instructional process is often misunderstood & debated. Whole language includes instruction combining phonics & whole word presentation to develop fluency & comprehension skills.