

ABRACADABRA Promotional Video Script

March 3, 2009

Reading and writing are essential skills in order for children to achieve academic success. Research suggests that if a child is unable to read by the end of grade three, the likelihood of school success decreases exponentially. This emphasizes the importance of early intervention.

The National Reading Panel Report – the most comprehensive review of literacy research – promotes systematic and explicit instruction of literacy skills. The NRP recommendations, along with important input from language arts specialists, teachers and students, have been incorporated into ABRACADABRA – a balanced reading approach for Canadians designed to achieve best results for all. By using a balanced approach, ABRA employs both meaning and skills-based methods to promote reading and writing development.

ABRACADABRA is a free, interactive web-based literacy resource designed for early elementary school-aged students, their educators, and their parents. Use of the software has shown significant beneficial effects on the literacy skills of early readers and with students who are at risk of school failure.

The fun and friendly interface allows children to enjoy learning while working on foundational skills necessary for successful reading and writing.

The overall structure of ABRA is modular with five modules in total: Instructional, Professional Development, Assessment, Communication and Parent.

The Instructional module contains 17 digital stories covering a variety of genres and themes and designed for a wide range of abilities and interests.

Instructional activities have been broken into 4 domains: Alphabets, Fluency, Comprehension and Writing, with most of the activities practiced within the context of a story. The majority of the ABRA activities have been designed with multiple level entry points – ranging from easy to more challenging levels – thus addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Alphabets provides children with systematic and sequential instruction, from learning the foundation builders such as the letters of the alphabet, letter-sound correspondence, auditory discrimination and syllable counting, to the more complex tasks of decoding and defining.

Activities in Fluency allow children to practice their reading with the intent to read at the right pace with few mistakes. Other activities ask children to read with the correct expression.

In the Comprehension activities, children may begin with putting the texts in order or recalling the elements of the story. They may then move to more complex tasks, such as summarizing.

Reading and writing are essential to becoming a literate person. Spelling is one of the first steps for producing good writers, and thus is part of ABRA's activities. In addition, writing constructs such as punctuation, use of capital letters, and sentence and paragraph construction, are all skills that students need to develop early on.

With the link to our electronic portfolio, ePEARL, children are able to practice their writing within an environment that supports self-regulated learning. Students set learning goals, reflect on their writing and obtain feedback from classmates, their teacher and their parents.

We continue to improve ABRA with a focus on embedded teacher support, including just in time videos and an extension package for in class use. Teachers may also visit the Teachers' Zone to learn what activities are best suited to the development of specific skills, or to access overviews of the stories, lesson plans, printable resources, and tips for teaching. Teachers may also review an activity to ensure it meets his/her instructional objectives. The Video Gallery contains videos of ABRA being used in different classroom settings.

The Assessment Module provides detailed class or student reporting by tracking the students' movements when they are completing activities. Teachers may use this information to evaluate a student's progress and to customize individual lessons.

The Communication module provides an environment where teachers are able to communicate and share ideas with one another.

And finally, since literacy is a family affair, we encourage parents to take a look at the Parent module. Here they may view a video about ABRA, and read tips on how literacy may be best supported in the home.

ABRA has gone through many phases of research and revision based on feedback from the educational community and on what we have learned from the results of our studies. Presently, we are in the midst of a three-year Pan-Canadian study using a randomized control trial format. The study has examined over four hundred students in kindergarten, grade one and grade two. The second year-results were very exciting, showing that children who used ABRA made significant gains in letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness and word reading, when compared to the children who did not use ABRA. The current year of the study is focusing on helping teachers become more comfortable with all of the components of ABRA, including the ePEARL features.

Two versions of ABRA are now available – the complete version of ABRA (including the Assessment module) is available as part of the CSLP's Learning Toolkit and must be stored locally at a school board. A lighter version of ABRA is available for those who wish to access the instructional activities over the web.

Also visit the LEARN store for complementary material such as printed ABRA books, stickers, and posters for the classroom.