



# THE Literacy CENTER

An interactive multisensory curriculum



## Case Study 4

### *Creative Options Head Start Aurora, Colorado*

## Reading Focus Makes Head Start Facility a Good Match

Located in Aurora, nine miles east of Denver, the campus of Creative Options Head Start is always bustling. Promptly at 8:00 a.m., the first of each school day's double sessions begins. After 4:00 p.m., kids from the second session stream out to meet Mom or Dad. In total, more than 200 youngsters, 3 to 5 years old, will each spend over three hours that day discovering and practicing their early-literacy skills, especially in the area of reading.

"We really push reading at Creative Options because it's the basis for everything else," says Wendie Edwards at the Head Start campus. "The Literacy Center definitely meets our needs and has quickly become a key tool. Both our teachers and our kids love it!"

Edwards is Education Director for United Cerebral Palsy of Colorado, which the Denver, Aurora and Cherry Creek school districts contract with to provide special education services. Most of Creative Options' young students, coming from economically disadvantaged families, are enrolled for free under a Head Start grant.

"It's our job to get these kids ready for school," says Edwards. "The Literacy Center helps us do that, and in pretty compelling ways."

### **Matches to Mandated Head Start Outcomes**

One reason why they chose the LEAPFROG SCHOOLHOUSE Literacy Center initially, Edwards explains, is because of its great match with Head Start's learning goals for students. The Center teaches numerous, specific outcomes mandated by the federal PreK program's thick book of *Performance Standards*.

And it's not only the outcomes that match. For example, Head Start now uses a "storybook curriculum" strategy, which meshes well with the LEAPPAD® platform's library of interactive books and, indeed, the entire LEAPFROG SCHOOLHOUSE curriculum.

Meeting learning outcome mandates will prove even more critical in the future, notes Edwards. Fiscal year 2001 brings a big budget increase for Head Start, a bloom of cash sure to add to already mounting accountability pressures. At Creative Options' campus, however, she expects The Literacy Center will not only help students achieve those learning goals, it will also document their journey and eventual success.

## Rotations and Groupings

Having acquired one Literacy Center for the Head Start preschool in October 2000, Edwards now rotates it through each of the site's seven classrooms. She also strives, to cycle most of the children through at least some of The Literacy Center's guided practice. Currently, 240 students (about 58 percent) of the campus' 420 youngsters are regular users, as are all 14 teachers.

In practical use, groups of students rotate through the Center's various activities, all within a regular class session. Deliberately, teachers construct the groups to ensure they contain children of various abilities so that they may learn from each other. "Peers at that age level will teach one another without hesitation," observes Edwards. This arrangement has worked very well for the school, so plans are underway to expand it.

In place just seven months, The Literacy Center has already been wholly adopted by the staff and students. "It's now truly a part of the classroom," says Edwards. "The children go to it all the time; they know how to turn it on and off, and how to use it. They'll even clean up the small pieces."

## Favorite Emerges

Clearly, her students' favorite component is the LEAPPAD platform and its interactive books. So Edwards has integrated the device and its unique titles in various ways throughout the school culture. For example, the LEAPPAD platform, with its high-quality audio capabilities, has been added to the campus' Listening Center.

Also, stressed students acting out or just out of sorts, will often be given a LEAPPAD platform, book, and headset and directed to the comforting "cozy corner" found in every classroom. "They put on the headphones and start doing the LEAPPAD and it just relaxes them," Edwards comments.

Edwards also notes that self-direction may be one reason for the LEAPPAD platform's calming effect. "It's their choice what to do," she says.

In fact, she views this as a clue to The Literacy Center's efficacy at imparting early-literacy skills. In addition to its being highly sensory and utilizing multiple learning modalities (auditory, visual, kinetic, and tactile), "we think the kids get more excited about the LEAPFROG curriculum than other things because it is so self-directed, extremely responsive to them, and uses only positive reinforcement," Edwards says. "They become utterly engaged."

While formal assessments won't occur for several months, changes can already be seen. Teachers anecdotally report noticing that a much higher percentage of their students can sight-identify letters and numbers. Edwards herself estimates 85 percent of her preschoolers can sight identify ten or more letters. Plus, "an awful lot more of the children are writing their names this year," notes Edwards.

Anticipating improved results, the staff is looking forward to the results of this spring's student assessments.

## "I Want One in Every Classroom"

This summer, Edwards plans to purchase at least six more Literacy Centers for Creative Options Head Start. "I want one in every classroom," she states, "absolutely, no question."

Moreover, as the burgeoning preschool adds more classrooms (three are slated for this year alone), each one will receive its own Literacy Center as a planned part of the budget.

"The Literacy Center is a key element for us," Edwards says. "It teaches exactly the right preliteracy skills as mandated by Head Start," she summarizes. It's loaded with features to allow youngsters to productively practice on their own. And in the hands of teachers, it's a powerful tool for identifying, and perhaps helping to fix, problems that prevent children from learning to read and write.

