

Ready Set Learn! Curriculum

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Overall Curricular Goal and Background

When Discovery Kids set about rebuilding their preschool television block, a primary goal was to create a curriculum that would define Ready Set Learn!

Discovery Kids spent a great deal of time identifying an overall goal for the curriculum. Pediatricians, teachers, parents and psychologists were interviewed and asked “What are the most important qualities children need to become lifelong learners?” Their responses were surprising. People did not name a particular skill or category of knowledge. Rather, people overwhelmingly agreed that persistence and the ability to accept and bounce back from mistakes and feelings of disappointment are the most important qualities of effective learners.

Preschoolers are natural learners. Eager to discover the mysteries of the world unfolding around them, they curiously explore all situations. An important goal of preschool education is to maintain and foster this natural propensity, thereby setting the stage for lifelong learning. However, there are obstacles to keeping this excitement about learning alive. Young children are just beginning to develop skills and knowledge of the world. They understandably encounter many failures and frustrations as a natural part of development. This can make them feel small, powerless and ineffectual. How well children recognize, modulate and cope with these feelings affects their ability to listen, concentrate, cooperate and persist - in short, to engage in the learning process.

Abundant research supports the opinion of these parents and professionals. Research has shown repeatedly that persistence and the ability to motivate oneself are essential characteristics of effective learners. Similarly, studies of children who cope well despite significant life stress (like illness or family dysfunction) indicate that what sets these children apart from peers who are more affected by stress are their optimism and resilience.

Thus, the overall goal of the RSL curriculum is to encourage an optimistic and resilient approach to learning in viewers.

To craft the curriculum, 6 attributes that optimistic and resilient children share were identified. Promoting these attributes is the heart of the curriculum. Each episode of “Paz” is created to model at least one of these attributes.

The Attributes of Optimistic and Resilient Children

Optimistic and resilient children have the following attributes:

Attribute 1 - Homebase

Optimistic and Resilient children have a homebase, a safe and predictable relationship that makes them feel secure and confident enough to venture out and explore the world. The caretaker is a child's first homebase relationship but as children grow, peer relationships also provide the security that enable children to venture out and try new things.

How Paz Models Homebase to Viewers

The innovative structure of the RSL block, with Paz appearing at the top of each half hour and talking directly to the viewer, makes Paz feel like the viewer's best friend. The intimacy, consistency and predictability of this relationship creates a homebase-like relationship within RSL for the viewer. With the viewer's "best friend" by his/her side, viewers more confidently experience the material in the block.

We also model the importance of relationships and of getting support from others by showcasing the important relationships in Paz's life in stories. For example in episode number 28, "Fine Feathered Friends", Paz realizes that he is physically different than his friends. He is very upset until his friends point out to him that his differences are his best parts. Thus, through the support of homebase peer relationships, he comes to accept and like himself even more.

Attribute 2 - Positive Attributional Style

People explain the good and bad things that happen to them – for example, someone might think I passed the test because I studied hard; another might think I failed the test because I had a headache.

Optimistic and resilient children tend to explain the good and bad things that happen to them in a way that protects their self esteem and optimism. This is called a positive attributional style.

A child with a positive attributional style believes he/she is the cause of good things (I got a soccer goal because I am good at soccer). But, when something bad happens, a child with a positive attributional style sees the cause as a temporary outside force (I missed the soccer goal because the goalie made a lucky save). This attributional style helps children to continue to expect good things to happen to them and to feel optimistic about the future.

How Paz Models a Positive Attributional Style to Viewers

Paz models a positive attributional style by highlighting how characters explain good and bad events to themselves. The show often demonstrates a character going from a negative

way of explaining things to a more positive way so the difference is clear. For example, in episode 13, “The Right Moves”, Pig tries to teach her friends a dance she made up, but they get it all wrong. At first, she thinks this is her fault – she’s a bad dance teacher. But then she realizes that it has nothing to do with her teaching, mistakes just happen. The change from her feeling at fault for their mistakes to realizing the mistakes have nothing to do with her models a change from a negative to a positive attributional style.

Attribute 3 – Problem Solving

Optimistic and resilient children are good problem solvers. They are aware of their own feelings and those of others. They use these feeling cues to understand when there is a problem. They also brainstorm to think of many possible solutions to a problem. Once a solution is implemented, they evaluate the solution to see if it is working and revise it as necessary.

How Paz Models Problem Solving to its Viewers

Problem solving is a complex skill, made up of many component skills (outlined above). Paz models problem solving by focusing on one of these component skills at a time. In episode # 9, “Kite Flight”, when Paz finds a new kite but is unsure how to fly it, he brainstorms ideas with his friends until he figures out how to make it fly.

Attribute 4 – Self Efficacy

Optimistic and resilient children have a strong sense of self-efficacy. They see themselves as competent and they believe they can meet challenges. This makes them eager to try new things and helps them to persevere should obstacles arise.

How Paz Models Self Efficacy to Viewers

To model this attribute, stories were created where characters hang in and push through obstacles. For example, in episode #12, “See-Saw”, Big Penguin and Paz build a see saw in the yard. Three friends want to play on it at once but it seems impossible because one side of the see saw is always too heavy. The friends experiment with weight until they find a way to all see saw together. Because the friends persevere, rather than give up, this episode models a sense of self efficacy.

Attribute 5 – Appropriate Risk Taking

Because optimistic and resilient children feel competent and responsible for positive outcomes, they are more willing to take risks. They also feel safe taking risks because they see mistakes as an inevitable part of the learning process and as an opportunity to try

something again. They do not see mistakes as a source of shame or punishment. In fact, they welcome pitfalls with good humor and tenacity.

How Paz Models a Willingness to take Appropriate Risks to Viewers

One important way that Paz encourages viewers to be open to appropriate risks is by framing mistakes as opportunities to try again, rather than as a source of shame or punishment. For example, in episode # 31, “Food for Thought”, Pig cooks a batch of blueberry muffins. Unbeknownst to her, they taste terrible. When her friends finally tell her the truth, they are worried she will be upset by the mistake. Instead, she sees her mistake as an opportunity and rather than eat them, she uses the muffins to play hide the muffin with her friends.

Attribute 6 – Setting Realistic Goals

Optimistic and resilient children are aware that they have strengths and weaknesses. They use this knowledge to set realistic goals for themselves, goals that are challenging but not too frustrating. This helps these children to succeed and experience a sense of mastery which reinforces all their other positive attributes.

How Paz Models Setting Realistic Goals to Viewers

On Paz, characters are often shown trying something new. Characters set goals that are too ambitious and then have to revise them. As we show our characters scaling down goals and asking for help, viewers realize its ok for them to do this, too. For example in episode # 4, “Red Scooter”, Pappy teaches Paz how to ride his scooter. Scootering is more difficult than it looks though, and Paz has to reset his goal and learn to ride, one step at a time. By modeling that skills take time to develop, that you can’t expect to do something well the first time, and that it’s ok to scale back and ask for help, we model to viewers how to be realistic in their goal setting.

Specific Learning Goals

Optimism and resilience help children to engage and persist in learning to ultimately master other areas of development. Therefore, these attributes are a vehicle to introduce other specific learning goals as well:

Specific Learning Goal 1 - Gaining Content Knowledge

Content knowledge is all the facts and information one typically learns in school. Paz presents a variety of content knowledge to children. Content knowledge addressed in the series includes: the concepts of heavy & light, physics, astronomy, senses, counting, rhyming, reading comprehension, valuing literacy, reading for information, alliteration,

and directions. For example, episode # 21, “Starry Night” presents many astronomy concepts as Paz goes to the moon and dances with the constellations.

Specific Learning Goal 2 – Stimulating Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills are thinking skills that help us acquire new knowledge and test and revise the knowledge we have. Some of the cognitive skills addressed in the series are: cause-and-effect reasoning, logical reasoning, following directions, flexible thinking, and visual spatial reasoning. For example, in episode #7, “Treasure Map”, the friends pretend they are pirates hunting for buried treasure. They follow a map and thus model how to follow directions.

Specific Learning Goal 3 - Developing Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are those that help children get along with other people and function within a group. Some interpersonal skills modeled in the series are: perspective taking, empathy, negotiation, competition, valuing others, and compromise. For example, in episode 31, “Food for Thought”, Pig makes muffins for her friends. The muffins taste horrible and the friends have to figure out how to let Pig know without hurting her feelings. Preschoolers have trouble seeing things from others’ perspectives – in this case, preschoolers might not realize that saying something bad about the muffins could hurt Pig’s feelings. The care the friends take to consider Pig’s feelings models the important skill of perspective taking.

Specific Learning Goal 4 - Enhancing Intrapersonal Understanding

Intrapersonal understanding refers to self awareness and the understanding of self – one’s own feelings, needs and desires. Intrapersonal skills addressed in the series include: identifying and understanding emotions (fear, impatience, anger, sadness, loneliness, and embarrassment), honesty, self-acceptance, and taking responsibility for actions. For example, in episode # 28, “Fine Feathered Friends”, Paz realizes he is physically different from his friends. He is initially upset but then comes to see that his differences are special. This models self-acceptance as he comes to appreciate his specific characteristics.