

## Opening the World of Learning™ (OWL): “Cheat Sheet” for VA ECE Leaders

This “cheat sheet” is meant to be a quick reference for administrators when planning effective professional development opportunities for PreK teachers. It contains excerpts from the [Head Start Curriculum Consumer Report – Preschool \(reviewed in 2018\)](#) as well as updated information provided by the publisher in May, 2020.

**Description:** [Opening the World of Learning™](#) (OWL)©2005 offers learning experiences and materials that develop language and early literacy skills in the context of content areas, such as math, science, and social studies. The curriculum is organized around eight thematic units that include daily lesson plans for whole group activities, small group activities, and learning centers.

*Note: As of January 2020, OWL is unavailable for purchase from the new publisher, Savvas, but PD for OWL remains available (see below).*

**Curricular Materials reviewed in the Curriculum Consumer Report:** Planning and Assessment: Teacher's Guide with Professional Development Handbook, Eight Thematic Teaching Guides, Literature to Read Aloud, Teaching Cards and Posters, CD-ROM Collection (e.g., Ollie's Resources for Teachers and Families, learning games), OWL online Pre-K offerings provided by the publisher

**Curricular Learning Goals for Children:** The Planning and Assessment Teacher's Guide with Professional Development Handbook lists measurable, developmentally appropriate learning goals organized by the domains of learning and development. Each of the learning centers and small and large group activities specifies the learning goals supported in the activities. Overall, most of the learning activities support children in making progress towards these learning goals. However, the curriculum lacks guidance on how to use the learning goals with diverse children or how to use the learning goals to individualize for all children.

**Professional Development offered by publisher:** Savvas provides free “program activation” PD, in onsite, virtual and online module formats and offers both one- and two-day in-person Implementation Essential trainings at an additional cost. Ongoing professional development and trainings feature a range of courses, including full-, and multiple-day workshops (e.g. Literacy Institutes) offered in person for an additional fee. Job-Embedded Services (e.g., Coaching) are also available at an additional cost. Savvas PD offerings and prices as of 5/2020 (subject to change) are provided in this [Savvas PD menu](#). For up-to-date pricing information, contact the [publisher](#).

**Curriculum Materials to Support Implementation:** OWL includes a comprehensive set of materials to support implementation. The Planning and Assessment Teacher's Guide with Professional Development Handbook provides an overview of the curriculum components, such as the Teacher Guides, Units 1–8, literature to read aloud, digital resources, teaching cards and posters, and manipulatives (optional for purchase). It includes information on setting up the learning environment, schedules and routines, and designing learning centers. The Teacher Guides provide daily lesson plans for each theme that describe the content and strategies for implementation (e.g., goals for the activities, vocabulary, and scaffolding strategies).

**Fidelity Tool:** OWL does not include a fidelity tool.

## Curricular Supports for Teacher-Child Interactions

- **Interactions that Extend Children's Learning:** The curriculum's learning activities do not provide guidance on how to use interactions to extend children's learning. While the "Questions of the Week" are open-ended (e.g., "What are desert animals like?"), there is no guidance on how to extend children's thinking and communication around these topics. The learning experiences are didactic and do not include open-ended questions or prompts to help children make connections to their own experiences. For example, children are provided with concept word cards related to the desert. Pairs of children are asked to talk about which animals listed in the word cards are desert animals and if they also live in the jungle. Then, a few children share, "What was on your card? Does it live in the jungle, too?"
- **Active Exploration:** The Planning and Assessment Teacher's Guide with Professional Development Handbook describes the importance of hands-on exploration for children's learning (e.g., children experiment, explore, and engage in purposeful and playful learning experiences, and develop academically, socially, and emotionally). A limitation of the activities described in the Teacher Guides is they do not provide children with ample opportunities to actively engage in open-ended, hands-on exploration. All activities, including learning centers, are structured and give specific directions about what children are to do in the center. Children have little opportunity to engage with materials in open-ended ways or create and experiment with materials.

## Curricular Supports for Individualization:

- **Individualization Based on Interests:** OWL does not offer guidance on how to plan learning experiences that build on individual children's interests. While children may select their center time activities, all learning experiences, including centers, are pre-planned, without guidance on how to modify them based on individual children's interests.
- **Individualization Based on Strengths and Needs:** The curriculum provides a variety of strategies to make learning experiences responsive to individual children's strengths and needs. For example, Teacher Guides provide ways to individualize learning through "Make It Easier!" and "Make It Harder!" prompts for different lessons across the units.
- **Individualization for Dual Language Learners (Scaffolding Strategies):** The curriculum provides specific, research-based scaffolding strategies. They are embedded throughout the learning activities in the Teacher Guides to support the development and learning of children who are DLLs. In addition, the curriculum provides weekly "English Language Development" lessons with scaffolding strategies for children at beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high levels of English language proficiency. Finally, the Planning and Assessment: Teacher's Guide with Professional Development Handbook includes an "Introduction to Linguistics," information about common first languages, and a chart comparing consonant sounds in English and other languages.
- **Individualization for Children with Special Needs (Teaching Practices and Interventions):** The curriculum provides specific guidance on how to individualize learning experiences for all children. The curriculum provides "Make It Easier!" prompts as well as guidance in Adaptations for Children with Special Needs to support children with special needs in specific activities and during each part of the daily schedule (e.g., morning meeting, center time, small groups).

## Child Assessment Tools and Guidance:

- **Ongoing Observation and Documentation:** The curriculum provides specific guidance embedded throughout the materials for teachers to monitor, document, and reflect on children's development. The Annotated Lesson includes "Review and Check: Monitor Progress in OWL." It guides teachers to use progress-monitoring assessment tools, observation checklists, and prompts that monitor children's oral vocabulary development. For each week, the Teacher Guides provide an overview of which "success predictors for kindergarten" (e.g., letter sounds, recognize and compare lengths, vocabulary words) will be monitored. Lesson plans for small group, literacy circle, and story time have "Monitor Progress" prompts that guide teachers around what language, literacy, and math skills to assess and how. For example, after introducing a concept word (e.g., "hospital") during literacy circle, the curriculum provides questions to assess children's understanding of the word (e.g., "Why do people go to a hospital?"). In addition, the curriculum gives specific guidance on how to use assessment information for curriculum planning. While the curriculum provides structured tools and checklists for monitoring children's progress, it lacks guidance on how to observe and document children's development and learning as part of everyday interactions and routines (e.g., anecdotal records, work samples).
- **Standardized and Structured Assessment Instruments:** OWL describes and provides a handful of structured assessment tools, such as a screening, observation checklists for each domain, progress monitoring assessment tools, and an end-of-the-year assessment. The curriculum encourages programs to use these assessment tools. However, the tools are not standardized (e.g., valid or reliable), and there is no guidance in the curriculum on how to select and use standardized and structured assessment instruments.