



Educational Goals prepared by Shalom Fisch, Ph.D.

Background and Need

Over the past decade, a great deal of attention has focused on the educational needs of young children. From prestigious white papers to federal legislation, much has been written about the critical need for young children to enter school “ready to learn” (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Resnick, 1996). Indeed, this high profile is well deserved, as research has shown that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that children develop during their early years are the foundation on which their later success is built, both in and outside of school (e.g., Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Rathbun & West, 2004).

Yet, to truly excel, children must be more than merely *ready* to learn. In the words of the National Research Council, children also need to be *eager* to learn (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). Children need to embrace challenges, to welcome opportunities to try something new, and to dive joyfully into hands-on learning.

Fortunately, as every parent and teacher knows, children have a tremendous head start in this respect. Young children are born learners. Whether it’s learning how to bounce a ball, build a block tower, or write their names, children frequently leap into new tasks with determination, a smile, and sometimes even a giggle. When they do master a new skill, it can be a source of enormous pride: “*Look what I can do!*”

In many ways, then, our responsibility as parents and educators is to build upon children’s pre-existing drive to learn, by sharing in their childlike enthusiasm while providing the support that is necessary for kids to tackle new skills and ideas. In this way, rather than turning learning into “work,” we can help children’s enthusiasm blossom into a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.

Educational Objective

With this in mind, Raggs LLC and Southern Star International have partnered to produce *Raggs*, an educational television series aimed at children aged three to six. *Raggs* uses the power of music, humor, and appealing characters -- not only to help children learn -- but to celebrate the joy of learning.

Raggs has three primary educational goals, which are aligned with the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (2002) Guidelines for Pre-Kindergarten Learning and Teaching:

1. To nurture three to six-year-olds’ sense of self and others, and to foster a strong motivation to learn and achieve.

For example:

- In the episode “Who Am I?,” the characters reflect on their individual interests and personalities while trying to choose the perfect birthday gift for a friend.





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- In the episode “New,” the characters celebrate “Try Something New Day” by practicing new skills, trying new foods, and finding new ways to do familiar things.

2. To introduce children to elements of academic learning that span the preschool curriculum.

For example:

- In the episode “Smell,” the characters explore different kinds of smells in their environment.
- In the episode “Jobs,” the characters pretend to have different sorts of grown-up occupations.

3. To use the power of music and humor to stimulate children to become actively involved in learning.

For example:

- In every episode, a “Wag & Wiggle” segment invites viewers to participate physically, while Dumpster’s lively conversations with real children connect the episode’s educational content to real life.

Each of these goals is divided into a variety of subgoals, as seen in the Full Statement of Educational Goals.

Educational Approach

Several key features characterize the way these goals are implemented in *Raggs*:

- In *Raggs*, the characters don’t just learn information that’s taught by others. Instead, they work as a team to discover new concepts, try things out...and have a great time along the way!
- The lessons in each episode are conveyed in multiple ways: via stories, songs, animation, and live-action footage of real kids and families. By presenting the same concepts in multiple segments, each episode of *Raggs* provides powerful reinforcement to help drive its lessons home for preschool children. At the same time, by embedding the material in a variety of formats and approaches, *Raggs* can tailor its educational content to a broad audience of children with a wide range of learning styles.
- At several points in every episode, Dumpster the Cat discusses the episode’s educational content with real children. These conversations not only reinforce the content presented elsewhere in the program (as noted above), but expand upon it by making connections to real life – thus providing a model for viewers to think about how the lessons might apply to their own lives too.
- Simultaneously -- and perhaps even more than *Raggs* other recurring segments -- Dumpster’s conversations grasp the opportunity to get kids thinking about process (e.g., how to build a building or help around the house) and to introduce new vocabulary. When Dumpster asks on-screen children to explain unfamiliar words, he’s helping to build viewers’ vocabularies. And, as research has shown, a rich vocabulary is a significant predictor of subsequent reading comprehension (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000).
- Of course, that’s not to say that thinking and talking are the only things that viewers of *Raggs* are encouraged to do. Every episode includes a “Wag & Wiggle” segment and an assortment of catchy, upbeat songs that are designed to engage viewers’ bodies as well as their minds, and get kids moving and dancing while they watch.



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“In all of these ways, Raggs draws upon the very best of educational practice. Beyond the appeal evident in the vast success that the Raggs television series has already achieved in Australia, this approach contributes to a television series that not only delights, but also benefits a broad audience of preschool children.”

-Shalom Fisch, Ph.D.

Full Statement of Educational Goals

1. To nurture three to six-year-olds’ sense of self and others, and to foster a strong motivation to learn and achieve.

This includes:

- A. Developing a sense of “who I am”
- B. Understanding “what I can do” and what remains to be learned
- C. Taking pride in accomplishments
- D. Pursuing challenges
- E. Asking questions
- F. Thinking creatively
- G. Trying new things
- H. Demonstrating confidence in own potential for learning and mastery
- I. Coping with failures via persistence and/or trying alternate approaches (rather than becoming frustrated or giving up)
- J. Being patient and delaying gratification
- K. Showing respect for self and others
- L. Expressing emotions, feelings, and ideas appropriately
- M. Working and playing collaboratively with others

2. To introduce children to elements of academic learning that span the preschool curriculum. This includes:

- A. Emergent Literacy
 - i. Enjoying oral and written stories
 - ii. Telling stories of the child’s own (both fiction and non-fiction)
 - iii. Playing with elements of phonemic awareness, such as letter sounds, rhyme, and rhythm
 - iv. Learning new words
 - v. Listening to others
 - vi. Developing conversation skills
 - vii. Appreciating connections between spoken and written language
 - viii. Understanding print conventions (e.g., hold book right side up, read left to right)
 - ix. Recognizing signs and symbols in the environment
 - x. Experimenting with writing and drawing



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B. Mathematics

- i. Comparing “more” and “less”
- ii. Using number names and counting in meaningful ways
- iii. Sorting objects into groups
- iv. Creating, describing, and looking for patterns
- v. Recognizing and describing common shapes
- vi. Identifying objects that are big/small, long/short, heavy/light, etc.
- vii. Using relational terms (e.g., behind/in front of/next to, big/little, fast/slow)

C. Science and Discovery

- i. Identifying questions/concepts to be explored
- ii. Observing objects and phenomena closely (using the appropriate senses)
- iii. Describing observations in detail (e.g., size, speed, color, texture, smell, etc.)
- iv. Looking for similarities and differences
- v. Finding connections among objects or events (e.g., “if-then,” rain and umbrellas)
- vi. Trying things out to test ideas
- vii. Making guesses about how or why things happen
- viii. Exploring age-appropriate concepts – examples include:
 - a. Changes in state, such as liquid/solid (e.g., water/ice)
 - b. What floats or sinks?
 - c. Light and shadow
 - d. “What’s Alive?” (i.e., living things grow, breathe, and eat/drink)
 - e. Characteristics of plants and animals
 - f. Life cycle (e.g., seed to plant, baby to adult)
 - g. Local landforms (e.g., hills, ponds, rivers)
 - h. Objects in the sky (e.g., sun, clouds, moon, stars)
 - i. Weather
 - j. Technology: How things work
 - k. Building with blocks and other materials
- ix. Communicating ideas clearly to others

D. Social Studies

- i. Developing sense of time via daily routines
- ii. Recognizing changes and similarities over time (e.g., current age vs. own baby photos, new friend or sibling, parents were once children too)
- iii. Describing own family, home, and neighborhood
- iv. Exploring what adults do in various jobs
- v. Taking on own responsibilities via household chores
- vi. Listing ways to travel by land, water, and air
- vii. Appreciating aspects of own and other cultures (e.g., characteristic food, music, stories, games)
- viii. Understanding the need to take care of the planet via recycling, not littering, turning off lights & water, etc.



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E. Arts & Movement

- i. Expressing selves via arts and movement
- ii. Enjoying a variety of musical styles
- iii. Making music by singing or playing instruments
- iv. Identifying moods expressed in music
- v. Exploring a variety of movements (e.g., running, climbing, jumping, hopping, balancing, swinging)
- vi. Experimenting with rhythm (e.g., clapping, matching movements to music)
- vii. Taking on roles in pretend play
- viii. Practicing new skills

3. To use the power of music and humor to stimulate children to become actively involved in learning. This includes:

- A. Encouraging children to connect series content to their own lives (e.g., by thinking about times when they encountered similar concepts or issues themselves)
- B. Providing opportunities for viewers to participate physically while watching





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