

# Walker Finds His Wiggle: Formative Process in Developing a Picture Book to Foster Physical Literacy in Young Children



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## BACKGROUND

In Northwest Florida (Escambia County), rates of overweight and obesity in young children are of concern. Additionally, there is a history of extreme poverty, crime, and health disparities. To address the health implications of overweight and obesity, *5-2-1-0 Escambia!* was implemented as a multi-setting obesity prevention initiative involving the local Florida Department of Health. At the same time, stakeholders from education, non-profit agencies, business, faith, community, civic, and philanthropic sectors supported initiatives to assist early learning (birth to 5 years) with the promotion of parents as the child's first literacy teacher.

With these local initiatives supporting physical activity and reading, researchers at the University of West Florida became interested in the use of picture books as an intervention strategy to promote physical literacy in young children. There is a growing body of research on picture books in children's learning (Heath, Houston-Price, & Kennedy, 2014; Lu, Cheng, & Chou, 2016). Picture books enhance language and academic literacy; expand life experiences; promote creativity; explore/regulate emotions; and nurture parent/caregiver interactions. When learning health-related behaviors, studies have investigated children's vegetable consumption using picture books. However, the use of children's picture books to foster physical literacy in preschool children is unknown. To begin to answer this question, the researchers developed the picture book, *Walker Finds His Wiggle*.

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to describe the formative process in developing the children's picture book, *Walker Finds His Wiggle*.

## METHODS

This qualitative study examined the timeline of events in order to describe the formative process that occurred in developing a children's picture book promoting movement and physical activity. Data collection included the research team's e-mails, meeting minutes, field notes, and reflective diaries from the inception of the project to completion. These records were analyzed thematically to gain an understanding of the sequence of events that occurred in developing a children's picture book.

## RESULTS

The development of the picture book took place over 16 months and consisted of four phases: Phase 1: Researching and Brainstorming; Phase 2: Drafting Storyline; Phase 3: Revising to Improve Storyline; and Phase 4: Printing and Publishing of Book.

Phase 1 focused on the approach to writing a children's book resulting in identifying a writer and illustrator with expertise in publishing picture books. Phase 2 involved a collaborative process between the research team and writing team in developing the storyline for the book. This iterative endeavor included the rejection of the initial animal character and storyline by the research team, recommendations for the main character, and integration of movement concepts into the storyline. Phase 3 concentrated on improving the storyline and illustrations and Phase 4 researched and finalized the printing and publishing of the book.



## Phase 1: Research & Brainstorming

This phase focused on determining what approach to take when writing a picture book that promoted physical activity targeting children ages 3 to 5 years old. Key events in this phase centered on the following themes: 1) world of children books; 2) reading & literacy; and 3) mechanics of writing a picture book.

### World of Children's Books

- Surveyed the different types of children's books
- Assessed the different sizes of books and fonts/illustrations
- Reviewed books with health-related topics
- Limited children's books related to physical activity

### Reading & Literacy

- Community efforts to promote reading as the building block of a child's educational journey
- Support parents as child's first literacy teacher

### Mechanics of Writing a Picture Book

- Identified consultant to coordinate the project
- Considered animals as central characters in book
- Decided on the size of book and number of pages
- Finalized book author and illustrator

## Phase 2: Drafting Storyline

The writing team presented the initial storyline with the main character as a weasel. A concept storyboard and script was presented to our research team.

A UWF faculty, with expertise in reading education, was consulted. In addition, the content was shared with Program Directors from the local Early Learning Coalition and Department of Health. There was a consensus that the main character and tone of the script needed to be revised.

## Phase 3: Revising to Improve Storyline

After many brainstorming sessions, the research team decided that the author and illustrator needed to gain an understanding of physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010) and movement concepts in relation to space awareness, effort, and relationship (Graham, Holt-Hale, & Parker, 2010) for the script to reflect our philosophy related to physical activity targeting children 3 to 5 years old. We also recommended that the main character be a dog and include animals that children would be familiar with in Northwest Florida. Once the revised script was approved, we continued to provide feedback to the author and illustrator.

## Phase 4: Printing & Publishing the Book

The funding for this project included printing 5000 copies of the book to be free to childcare centers, schools, and families in Escambia County. A local printing company was selected for the project. This company selected the quality of paper to use that would be more "child proof". The illustrator provided the final proof to the printer. There are future plans to work with the author to publish the book for sale via the Internet. Funds from book sales will go back into the project for future books and curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study described the formative process used in the development of the picture book, *Walker Finds His Wiggle*, a story providing themed physical activity to promote movement development in young children. Next steps include investigating the impact of the picture book on the nurturing of physical literacy in young children.

## REFERENCES

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