

Blockbuster Braille:

Setting the Stage for Literacy

- Frances Mary D'Andrea, Ph.D.

Great Start Presentation

Tuesday, August 6, 2013

literacy2@mindspring.com

This handout contains the primary text of the PowerPoint that will be presented during the workshop on this day.

Goals for the session:

- Participants will be able to:
- list essential elements of an effective emergent literacy program and discuss the importance of early exposure to reading and writing in braille.
- identify the impact of visual impairment on the development of early reading and writing skills.
- characteristics of good readers and list various emergent literacy activities.

What is literacy?

Some definitions:

- Being able to read & write
- “making meaning” of messages in your environment
- The use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in everyday life
- How someone interacts with people and participates in activities across contexts
- All of the above? None of the above?

What is Literacy?

“Literacy includes the ability to use accumulated experiences and ideas to bring personal meaning and understanding to a story. It also includes the ability to express ideas so that others are able to understand. Literacy, then involves bringing meaning and experiences to stories, getting meaning from the words or symbols in stories, and using spoken or written words to express ideas and meaning.”

*From **On the Way to Literacy: Early Experiences for Visually Impaired Children**, Josephine Stratton & Suzette Wright, 1991, p.*

A blockbuster start!

- How do we move students to literacy?
- How do we ensure that students become as literate as possible?
- What is our role in the reading/writing process?

Challenges

- Less exposure to reading medium
- May have less background knowledge
- May have “spotty” understanding of some concepts
- Need for concrete, multisensory, hands-on experiences, from beginning to end, more often than once

Challenges for Braille Readers

- Picture-dependent early books
- Ergonomics

- Monitoring the introduction of contractions and short form words
- Sufficient practice to become proficient

Challenges for Students with Low Vision

- Need for training with optical devices
- Ergonomics: comfort vs. fatigue
- Assumptions about incidental learning
- Danger of falling through the cracks

Specific Reading Challenges

- Sharpness and clarity of vision
- Visual span
- Visual tracking
- Position of scotomas
- Environmental factors (lighting, visual clutter, etc.)

Students with Multiple Disabilities

- Often not considered to be candidates for literacy learning
- May have physical and/or cognitive disabilities
- New thinking about what literacy means for these students
- Slower pace of learning, frequent practice, authentic contexts
- Some exciting developments

Readiness vs. Emergent literacy

--Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998

Readiness:

- Skills seen as preparation for reading
- Focuses on skills children should master before reading instruction.
- A boundary between “prereading” and “real” reading

Emergent literacy

- Developmental model emphasizes continuity between preschool and formal instruction
- Children develop concepts about literacy from infancy well before “formal” teaching
- Reading, writing, oral language develop concurrently from experiences and social interactions
- Skills, knowledge, attitudes about reading and the environments that support them

• **Key Concepts About Developing Literacy**

- Literacy begins at birth.
- Literacy is a life-long process.
- Literacy is tied to language development.
- Literacy is tied to concept development.
- Literacy is fun!

Where to start:

Children who are blind or visually impaired need direct, concrete, and hands-on experiences:

- often do not learn vicariously from watching others
- need a rich variety of experiences that develop all their senses
- provide many opportunities to learn by doing, not only by listening
- do activities from beginning to end, and many times and in different contexts
- learning through play

Concept Development

The need to explore freely and have the opportunity to develop basic concepts:

- body concepts
- spatial concepts
- emotional/social
- time concepts
- environmental awareness
- movement/gross motor
- object characteristics/fine motor

All of this will lead to greater comprehension of the world around them, and thus of the things they will later read and write about.

Concept Building

- Children who are blind or visually impaired bring to the reading/writing process what they know about the

world from their experiences of interacting with their world:

- provide a broad range of experiences, and point out familiar and unfamiliar features
- relate new experiences to familiar ones
- help children anticipate what may be expected in various surroundings
- start with real objects, and then move to representations of those objects
- encourage active exploration and encourage mess

Language Development

- demonstrates an increase in listening and speaking vocabulary
 - uses new vocabulary in daily communication
 - uses language for a variety of purposes
 - uses sentences of increasing length and complexity
 - tells a simple personal narrative
 - asks questions
 - begins to retell stories in a sequence
 - experiments with language
- Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero (2011)

Concepts about books & text

- knows that letters make words, and words have spaces between them
- recognizes that written words have meaning
- understands text is read from left to right and from top to bottom of the page

- understands difference between text and pictures or tactile graphics in a book
- demonstrates an interest in books and reading
- enjoys listening to and talking about books
- asks to be read to
- pretends to read and attempts to read
- understands that reading is a way to get information.
 - Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero (2011)

How Adults Facilitate Literacy

- By reading to children again & again: demonstrating what it means to be a reader
- By reading & rereading with children various simple and patterned texts that have natural language
- By responding positively to children's early attempts to read.
- By providing an emotionally safe environment for risk-taking
- By supporting children in reading
- By expecting children to succeed at reading rather than to fail.

--Weaver, (1996)

Book Connections

- Exposure to books and many different kinds of reading materials
- Connection between familiar and unfamiliar
- Help children anticipate what might be expected in various surroundings
- Start with real objects then move to representations

- Encourage active exploration to build concepts that will later build reading comprehension

Cambourne's Conditions of Learning

- immersion
- demonstration
- engagement
- expectations
- responsibility
- employment
- approximations
- response & feedback

Essential elements for literacy

- literacy-rich environment
- phonemic awareness
- phonics
- fluency
- vocabulary
- comprehension
- motivation and engagement
- writing

Literacy-rich environment

- Provide an environment filled with print & braille being used in authentic ways
- Make explicit the uses of reading and writing in the environment
- Help focus attention:
 - Novelty
 - Intensity
 - Meaningful
 - Emotional
- Have a variety of engaging books and other reading material available

- Create wonderful reading spaces
- Have plenty of writing materials and equipment available

Phonemic Awareness

- Focuses on the sounds of spoken language
- Awareness of individual sounds: phonemes
- Only a few minutes per day
- Alone, but also powerful when paired with phonics activities

Phonemic Awareness

- Focuses on the sounds of spoken language
- Awareness of individual sounds: phonemes
- May learn best as onsets-rimes (word families)
- Awareness of individual sounds: phonemes
 - Isolating sounds
 - Identifying phonemes
 - Categorizing and matching
 - Rhyming
 - Blending sounds
 - Segmenting beginning and ending (onset-rime)
 - Segmenting separate sounds
 - Playing with sounds (deleting, substituting)]

Only a few minutes per day

Phonics

- A strategy for identifying words

- Matching sounds to letters: decoding
- Immediate identification so can focus on comprehension
- tied to automaticity & fluent reading; automatic processing allows for better comprehension & use of background knowledge

Sample phonics sequence

from Making Sense of Phonics by Beck (2006)

- focus children's attention on the sound of the letter in the initial position (phonemic awareness)
- connect the printed letter with the sound it represents
- discriminate among words that have the letter-sound in initial position and those that don't
- focus child's attention on sound in final position (phonemic awareness)
- discriminate among words that have the letter-sound in the final position and those that don't
- discriminate among words that have the letter-sound in initial and final positions.

Comprehension

- The reason why we read: to understand
- Reading amount predicts comprehension.
- The importance of background knowledge
- Concept development and knowledge of the world
- Requires word recognition & vocabulary

Listening & Reading

- responds to literal and inferential questions
- makes predictions
- can retell the text
- has a sense of story structure
- talks about books
- asks questions about information or events in books
- connects events in book to real life
- demonstrates understanding that digital media can be used for information

— Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero (2011)

Encouraging comprehension

- Focus on story:
setting, characters, theme, plot, sequence
- Focus on meaning:
details, predicting, relating to self, elaborations, interpretations
- Focus on illustrations and objects:
discussing details, relating to plot elements
adapted from Morrow (1998)

Vocabulary

- Has substantial influence on text comprehension
- Relation to background knowledge & experience
- Reciprocal relationship between vocabulary and comprehension

Encouraging vocabulary development

- Talk a LOT to children
30 million words by age 3 vs. 10 million
(Hart & Risley, 1995)
- Explain what words mean
- Reading stories aloud over and over
- Using words in different contexts
- Reinforcing child's use of language and new words

Fluency

- Automatic processing & identification: Automaticity
- Fluency: accuracy, speed, prosody
- Related to comprehension of text
- Works at many levels

Fluency for beginning readers

- model fluent reading
- start with easy books and focus on prosody and comprehension
- choose books that have rhythm
- encourage children to evaluate their reading:
 - How do you think you sounded?
 - Can you make it sound like talking?
 - Look at this punctuation mark. What does it tell you to do?
 - Can you make it sound like the character?
 - Can you read it more quickly?

Emergent writers

- understand that writing communicates ideas
- may use pictures to communicate
- may add scribbles, letter-like symbols, or random letters to add “words”
- do not yet connect letters and sounds
- will pretend to “read” their text
- do not yet understand writing says the same thing each time

— Rog, L.J. (2007)

Writing Activities

- Allow children to scribble with screen board, braille writer, slate
- Explicitly model writing and when you use it
- Shared writing activities
 - Language experience stories
 - Creating books with children

Also important!

- family factors (language, support, etc.)
- high quality books in different genres
- motivation
- use of technology

Keys to Literacy

- Read, read, read to your child. Create an “literacy rich” environment: braille, print, & writing

implements.

- Develop conversational turn-taking; wait for your child's responses. Look for subtle clues in behavior.
- Arrange the environment so the child has to communicate with others.
- Use social routines to encourage language.
- Take the child on errands in the community and talk about what you feel, hear, smell, taste, and see.
- Encourage the child to explore familiar places independently: bedroom, family room, closet, etc.
- Give opportunities for the child to write.
- Use real objects as much as possible, then teach the concept of "model" (e.g., compare a toy car to a real car).
- Expand on concepts learned, e.g. once the child has learned "car" expand to bus, van, pickup truck, etc.
- Teach the child how to explore safely and completely with hands. Sometimes using the back of the hands is less scary.
- Play games like "Simon Says," "Mother May I" and other games that encourage body movement.
- Encourage children to feel a variety of textures.
- Use "book bags" while reading stories (have the objects from the story on hand while reading).

Resources for Emergent Literacy & Young Children

- National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org>

- International Reading Association
www.reading.org
- Family Connect
www.familyconnect.org
- Hadley School for the Blind
www.hadley.edu
- National Dissemination Center For Children with Disabilities
<http://nichcy.org/>