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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter



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Letter from the Editor

Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disability and Deafblind Specialist



I love to read. Growing up, my family would tease me because I always had three or four books going at the same time... one in every room! When I read, I lose myself in the book. Often laughing aloud, yelling at the characters, or rewriting the endings in my mind. A good book helps me relax after a long day, entertains me during a flight (or while sitting in an airport), and gives me a way to connect with my loved ones. I live far away from my 10-year-old niece, but I often read books she recommends so that we can talk about them. I cannot imagine my life without words and stories!

For many students with disabilities, literacy can seem challenging at best, and absolutely impossible at worst. The reasons for this vary from challenges with letter/sound correspondence, memory, and concentration, to more complex challenges including: vision or hearing loss, lack of communication skills, medical needs, physical disabilities, or behavior that interferes with learning. For teachers, the day needs to balance out with many different skills and activities including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, life skills, adaptive skills, and academic skills. It can seem almost impossible to figure out a literacy method that will work with your students. For many teachers, teaching literacy to students with disabilities can feel like a guessing game.

This month, we want to talk about literacy in the context of specific disabilities and needs. Literacy includes reading and writing, but it also looks at rhythm, rhyme, and storytelling. This month we want to talk about different ways to incorporate literacy throughout a student's day: in occupational and physical therapy activities, during speech sessions, and in the hallways when talking to friends. There are many different programs out there, and while they each have pros and cons, there are curriculums designed to help students who have specific disabilities participate in meaningful literacy activities. Literacy is so much more than just identifying words on a page. It means the difference between being able to share about your recent vacation and just sitting in class; the difference between enjoying a Dr. Seuss book and zoning out; and the difference between enjoying different places and ideas or just listening to a book because you are supposed to.

I am currently reading several different books:

Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja (a hilarious adventure for children ages 9-12), *Before I Found You* (a gripping mystery full of killer twists), and *The Frontiersman's Daughter* (a novel). What are you reading?

[Jennifer Schroeder](#)

SESA Multiple Disability and Deafblind Specialist

Using Edmark Reading Program for a Beginner Reader with Profound Hearing Loss

Olivia Yancey, SESA Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

Christopher Hayes, MA, CED, is an itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. In the Odyssey, which facilitates the sharing of information from schools and programs that serve students with hearing loss all over the nation, Christopher summarized his reasons for switching to Edmark Reading Program (ERP) for one of his students. This student had a profound hearing loss, living in an "economically and socially disadvantaged home where he experienced little language, was struggling to read and write." This student was often absent from school or had moved to multiple different schools with his family. As a beginner reader, he was not acquiring phonics skills that would help him decode words and acquire meaning from what he was reading. Christopher decided to teach sight words as a method of decoding print during his pull-out sessions with this student.

The Edmark Reading Program (ERP) allowed Christopher to assess the student's current knowledge of sight words, provide instruction of sight words most commonly found in children books (e.g., Dolch words) using visuals to support this instruction. The visual supports allowed his student with profound hearing loss make sense of the text. Christopher noted that ERP programmed repetition in reviewing the words, writing full sentences, identifying the words in isolation, in phrases, and in stories. He indicated that the most important piece to the program was the requirement of critical thinking and analysis of what his student was reading. Over time and with support from the staff at his student's school, Christopher noticed progress in his student's transition from the first to the second level of ERP and a development of self-esteem and confidence while working on literacy skills.

For more information about this program:

- [Don Johnston, Inc. - Edmark Reading Online and Print](#)
- [Article: Measuring Success One \(Sight\) Syllable at a Time: Odyssey, 18, 62-65](#)
- [SESA Library](#)

Literacy for Students with Cognitive Impairments, Communication Impairments (Non-Verbal), and Multiple Disabilities

By Meriah Cory and Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disability Specialists

When you think of the term "literacy", what is the first thing that comes to your mind? For many people, the first thing is reading. It might be reading for pleasure, reading for your job, or reading to put a project together. However, the term "literacy" encompasses so much more than just reading. LITERACY is reading, enjoying someone reading to you, writing, creating a scribble list, and it starts long before a child is able to read.

For students with cognitive impairments, multiple disabilities and those who are non- (or minimally) verbal, the thought of teaching literacy can be daunting. Where do you start? What are the reasons or goals you want to accomplish? What adaptations will need to be made? And, how do I fit it into an already busy day when I working on OT, PT, speech, social skills, sensory activities, lunch, recess, etc.! It is possible to have literacy as a part of every student's day, as long as you realize that it might look different from what other kids are doing.

How do I teach READING to my student?

- Before you can teach someone to read, you need to teach them to look at, interact with, and enjoy books. Students should see you reading, have a book read to them, and get to physically explore books.
- You may have to create an adapted book for your student, a book with tactile pictures, or a book on the iPad. Try creating a book that is about your student and see how fast they are interested in not only in reading it, but in sharing it with others.
- Let your students play with letters: letter beads, letter magnets, letter cards, braille letters, or letters cut out of a magazine. As the student explores the letters, you can talk to them about what they are touching, looking at, or manipulating.
- Rhymes are so much fun and are a great place to start! Create a rhyme that uses your student's names, the school name, or their favorite character's name. Use pictures to illustrate it and read it aloud with gusto.
- Remember, not everyone has the same "type" of book, and that is okay. I have some students who only use books created on the iPad, other students who have object books that include real-sized objects that they like, and students who love board books with texture. I have other students who like "real" books but need rebus pictures added in to help them understand what is happening.
- Choose a book to read and do a "Look and Guess". Go through the book one page at a time and talk about the illustrations. Talk about what you think the story might be about, or what you think is happening. This is a great way to help students tune into the pictures in the story, as well as a good way to model that inner narrative that many readers use when looking at books.
- Once you have chosen a book, do a "Letter Hunt" or a "Word Hunt". Go through the book and look for different letters (if the text is big enough) or certain words that are repeated. Again, as you look through the book, narrate what you are doing and seeing to help the student tune into the print, as well as continue to work on that inner narrative that readers use.

How do I teach WRITING to my student?

- Writing does not mean copying, tracing, or otherwise learning how to create a specific "shape" on the paper. Writing means getting the ideas out of your head and down in a readable format.

- Pencils come in many forms for our students. An alternate pencil can be: a letter flipbook, a weighted pencil, a pencil within a tennis ball (easier to hold), a computer, an iPad, or markers.
- Writing has different stages, and if a child misses one of the stages, it is much harder to get to the recognizable word writing stage. Writing starts with scribbling. Scribbling progresses to controlled scribbling. From there, you move on to mock writing. After mock writing you are starting to create words and sentences that have many errors, but are typically readable. You can scribble write with a pencil, alternate pencil, adapted pencil, computer, or an iPad.
- Make a sentence strip sentence starter. Choose 1 sentence starter a week. Staff gets one color, and the student gets a different color. Write the sentence starter on 4-5 sentence strips in big bold letters. Review the sentence starter with your student for each sentence. Show your student the first sentence strip (e.g. "I like..."). Then tell him/her that s/he gets to choose the word to put in. Go through a list of words, whether you know if s/he likes them or not, and let her say "no" or "yes". S/he may pick something silly and that is okay! Just read it back in a silly way, acting SOOO surprised that she chose it! After she chooses a word, write it down, and then read the sentence back to her.
- In addition to using sentence strips with things that your student does/see/hear/feel/like/want, remember to also do the opposite! This is a huge skill and one that everyone can have a lot of fun with. You can: do not want/not like/not hear/not see/not feel and pick some very fun and silly things. When the student reads it to someone, s/he can also have a voice (on a switch, iPad, communication card) that really stresses the NOT part (e.g. "I do NOT like ice cream!").

Often, literacy for students with more complex disabilities include things such as switches, Bigmac's, iPads, or low-tech alternate pencils. Just having a student put pencil to paper is writing! Or, having them choose a letter from the flipbook (they can hit "yes" when you get to the letter they want) is writing! If your student chooses the letter "s" for example, now you can have peers think up silly "s" words. Just because you don't see real words, or letters, does not mean that the student isn't writing... it just means they are in stage one and have lots to learn!



Matching a picture to a letter: when only given 2 choices and before the teacher reads the line aloud.



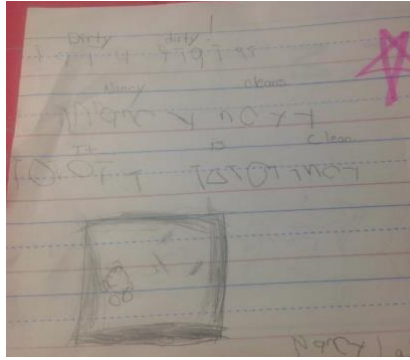
Singing a favorite song book: when it's time for the repetitive line, the adult pauses so the student can "sing" it.



It's so much fun to read the repeated line in a story!



Who needs a pen or pencil when you have cotton swabs available!



Just because it doesn't look like traditional writing, doesn't mean the student can't "tell" you the story using an iPad.



Adding pictures to the text makes it much easier for a student to comprehend.

Online resources for students who are Deafblind or Multiply Disabled:

- [Overview of Multiple Disabilities and Deafblindness](#)
- [Literacy Skills Checklist](#)
- [Literacy for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss](#)

Literacy Skills and Students with Visual Impairments

By Angel Black, SESA Vision Impairment & Multiple Disabilities Specialist



Literacy for a student with a visual impairment can look very different for each student depending on whether or not they are a regular print, large print, braille, dual-media, or an auditory reader.

Most researchers agree that any literacy experiences with infants and toddlers are best combined with meaningful interactions with familiar adults. As children move up grade levels it appears the gap in their literacy growth widens between students with and those without a visual impairment. So, it is very important to monitor the student's progress so that interventions can be implemented if needed. Daily literacy instruction within a structured format is essential for these readers. Other recommended general strategies include: repeated readings, direct instruction in phonics, decoding morphemes, exposure to a wide selection of reading genres, and of course, there are other strategies to look at depending on the literacy media for your student.

Always remember with a student that has a visual impairment, you begin with the needs of that student. By doing that and getting the help of a teacher of the visually impaired, the student's visual functioning and how it relates to reading literacy in the classroom environment can be identified.

Literacy for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Samantha Weiland, SESA Autism Specialist

Students with autism are strong visual learners, meaning they learn well through pictures. However, they tend to struggle with making meaning of letter and number symbols. They learn best when material is concrete and does not leave room for interpretation. Students with autism have difficulty with literacy because of: behavior, theory of mind, are strong visual learners, and often struggle with communication.



Behavior: Literacy is an abstract concept for individuals with autism. As students progress from rote reading to having to make inferences, sometimes we encounter behavior challenges. Spelling and writing can also become a challenge for students with autism especially if letter symbols do not have meaning for them. It is important early on when teaching our students that they make sense of letter symbols for reading, writing, and communication.



Theory of Mind: Students with autism have difficulty understanding other peer's perspectives. Literacy for students with autism becomes difficult in higher grades especially when they are having to study and understand the character's perspectives. It is also a challenge when students have to take the text and make inferences to answer comprehension questions.



Visual Learners: As stated before, students with autism are often strong visual learners and need their instruction to be visually relevant to understand concepts. Early on, it is difficult for students with autism to learn the sounds of letter symbols when they do not understand the meaning of letters. It is important to teach students to learn to see their sounds. This will lead to expanding their functional communication and enhance their spelling and writing skills.



Communication: Sometimes students with autism have limited or no functional communication. Literacy becomes a challenge to students with autism because they may have not been exposed to literacy and does not have meaning to them. Early literacy skills helps develop communication skills for students with autism and getting them engaged in learning.

Early exposure of strong foundational phonemes and phonemic awareness paired with visual supports (i.e. mouth pictures for sounds, pictures with CVC words, graphic organizers) will help students with autism develop literacy skills. As you teach literacy to students with autism, keep in mind the following:

"For all children to become members of their literate communities, we must consider reading and writing not as end products but rather as socially constructed communicative practices that begin to emerge early in childhood as other communicative abilities do. Both oral and written language are thus best viewed as primarily communicative practices, and an intervention to achieve that end is best viewed as situated practice. Consequently, to support

emergent literacy development, we want to consider... the social, functional, physical, and emotional contexts of the literacy event so that both oral and written communication and language development can be focused upon"

(Kaderavek & Rabidoux, 2004, p.239)

Online Literacy Resources:

- [Meaningful Language, Purposeful Literacy, Ready Children](#)
- [Reading Comprehension and Autism in the Primary General Education Classroom](#)
- [Language and Literacy Development Among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\) & Literacy](#)

Evidence Based Literacy Curriculum:

[Reading Literacy & Comprehension Curriculum for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum](#) This curriculum is available through the [SESA Library](#)

Behavioral Difficulties and Reading Instruction

By Samantha Cowper, SESA Emotional Disabilities Specialist

Although there has always been an emphasis on reading instruction in the elementary curriculum, there is not a consensus on how to teach this essential skill to all children. For children who experience behavior difficulties in the classroom, academic instruction of any kind is difficult and many teachers struggle to provide the appropriate instruction to facilitate progress. Due to inappropriate or unproductive behavior, students with behavior challenges may show deficits in reading resulting from inadequate or inappropriate instruction instead of dysfunctions in the psychological processes used for reading.

The concepts of functional behavior analysis can be applied to reading instruction as a means to help determine the cause of a reading difficulty. Once a cause is determined, appropriate interventions can target this specified area. Functional analysis is a method used to study inappropriate or unproductive behavior. The process involves defining the behavior, observing its frequency, intensity, and duration and then implementing one or more interventions, based on the hypothesis of the function of the behavior, used before or after the behavior to alter it. These same principles can be applied to academic difficulties. In this type of model, five possible hypotheses for academic deficits can be tested as functional reasons why students struggle in a specified academic area such as reading. Each hypothesis provides valuable information about why students are not learning.

The five hypotheses for academic failure are:

1. THEY DO NOT WANT TO DO THE TASK

Based on the notion that student failure is due to lack of motivation. This hypothesis can be tested by providing reading instruction at the student's instructional level and providing motivating incentives to work. If the student responds to the incentives, then one can assume skills are in place. If the student does not respond, either the necessary skills are not in place or the incentive was not motivating enough.

2. THEY HAVE NOT SPENT ENOUGH TIME DOING THE TASK

Refers to the amount of time students spend practicing a skill. To test this hypothesis, students should be observed to determine their rates of active responding in relation to reading skills. If rates are low, increasing the opportunities for active responding should positively impact learning.

3. THEY HAVE NOT HAD ENOUGH HELP TO DO THE TASK

Sometimes students experience failure because they have not had enough help to master the required skills. Teachers can increase mastery by changing two aspects of instruction: providing feedback and matching instructional procedures to student skill level. This hypothesis can be tested by increasing or improving each of these aspects and measuring resulting changes in student learning.

4. THEY HAVE NOT HAD TO DO THE TASK THAT WAY BEFORE

Methods and materials used for instruction should compel the student to practice skills in the way they actually use them to help solidify mastery and generalization. This hypothesis can be tested by carefully reviewing instructional materials to determine if they help with skill mastery and provide sufficient examples and non-examples to help students generalize the skill to different contexts. In combining hypothesis 2 with 4 means students need to spend enough time practicing new learning to achieve mastery and must be practicing with the appropriate materials.

5. THE TASK IS TOO DIFFICULT

This final hypothesis contemplates whether the instructional material is too difficult for the student. A student should not make errors on more than 5% - 9% of the required responses. This type of error response allows students to continue to advance in new learning without becoming frustrated. Teachers should adapt or modify the curriculum if it is too difficult for the student.

Deeply-rooted in this model to improve reading instruction is the requirement of teachers to know their students' present levels of reading performance and then use a method and materials to match these instructional levels. These processes help assure students are receiving adequate and appropriate reading instruction where they can progress to their potential.

Online Resource:

[Using Functional Analysis to Improve Reading Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders](#) Gibb, G.S. & Wilder, L. K.

SESA Library Resources

Anne Freitag, SESA Librarian



[Literacy for Students with Special Needs](#)

This list includes materials on developing literacy skills in students with special needs. It doesn't include all materials on teaching braille. You can search the library catalog to find what we have, or please me directly.



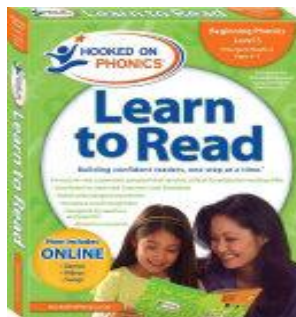
[Adapted Books and Related Materials](#)

Definition of adapted books: Any book that has been modified in some way that makes it more accessible to a student who has difficulty with typical books. Adaptations can include: fluffers, extenders, contrast, braille, simplified text, age appropriate text adaptation, glare, and tactile additions. Adding Boardmaker symbols and props, match and press, touch and feel, scratch and sniff are all adaptations. Using books on CD-ROM with adapted keyboards, single switch or a TouchWindow is another method. These materials are more for emergent and early literacy, rather than the NIMAS textbook adaptations.

Reading Kits and Books:



Edmark Level 1 & Level 2



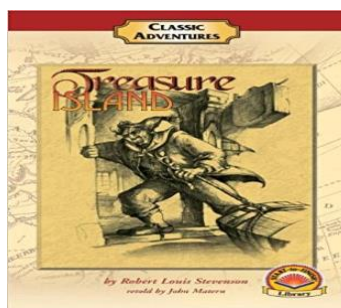
Hooked on Phonics sets



Building on Patterns
For learning to read braille



Shared Reading Project
Book and DVD sets with the story in
American Sign Language on the DVD



Don Johnston
Start-to-Finish books
Book, computer disk, and
audio CD



On the Way to Literacy
Braille and large print

