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Reading Connections: Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Impairments
Friday 3:30-5:00 PM

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Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Program
Reading Connections: Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Impairments
Cheryl Kamei-Hannan, Ph.D.

Session Overview
- 5 essential components of reading
- Additional areas for successful reading
- How is each area impacted by a visual impairment
- Meet Alejandro
- Activities to support learning

Figure 1 Image of a teacher sitting in a chair reading to 4 young students. One female student stands to her right and the others sit on the floor in front of her.

Figure 2 Graphic related to the 5 essential components of reading: a circular puzzle with "reading" in the center and a “?” in each of the surrounding puzzle pieces.
Phonemic Awareness

- The specific understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds, or phonemes
- The ability to hear and manipulate the smallest units of sound, or phonemes, in spoken language

For Example:
- Segmenting: ability to break apart words into their individual phonemes (pan = /p/ /a/ /n/)
- Blending: ability to say a spoken word when its individual phonemes are said slowly (/p/ /a/ /n/ = pan)

Teaching Routine for PA

- Today we will practice putting sounds together to say words. We will practice saying sounds slowly like a turtle and then say them fast like a rabbit.
- First, it is my turn. Listen to me as I say a word slowly like a turtle.

Impact of VI on PA

- Generally, students who are visually impaired do well in PA
- Students are able to hear sounds and manipulate them
- This is primarily an aural task
- There are some students for whom this task is difficult, and performance is a predictor of later reading ability

Phonics and Beginning Decoding

- Letter-sound correspondence
- “Phonics is a way of teaching reading that conveys an understanding that there are correspondences between phonemes (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language).” Reithaug (2002)

For example:
cat = /c/ /a/ /t/

Teaching Routine for basic phonics
• Today we will practice naming letters and saying their sounds. Then, we will practice writing the letters. Listen to me as I say the letter and the sound that it makes.

Slide 8

m

Advanced or Multisyllabic Decoding

• Reading longer words with two or more syllables
• Learning and applying strategies to help “decode words containing more complex combinations of letters as well as words that contain multiple syllables” (Bursuck & Damer, 2007)

For example:
reporting = (re)(port)(ing)
compensation = (com)(pen)(sa)(tion)

Impact of VI on Phonics and Decoding

• Children who are visually impaired use the same phonetic principles as sighted readers when reading
• Braille contractions may be helpful in grouping letters and sounds since many contractions are common phonemes (e.g. /sh/, /th/, /er/)
• Skilled readers read with automaticity and do not need to decode words, but may rely on decoding skills when they come to a word they do not know

Figure 4 Image of a girl sitting at a desk using a braillewriter.

Fluency

• Reading fluency is the ability to read text quickly and accurately with appropriate expression
• Combination of
  ➢ Reading speed or automaticity
  ➢ Accuracy
  ➢ Prosody
• Automaticity allows readers to focus on comprehension
Impact of VI on Fluency

- Students who are visually impaired often is an area of weakness for children with visual impairments
- Visual performance may be impacted by individual visual efficiency skills, as well as stamina, fatigue, lighting conditions, size of print, distance to print, and clarity of the printed materials
- Tactile processing may slow reading rates
- Proficient readers read accurately, efficiently, and with expression – so that it sounds like spoken language

Vocabulary

- The ability to understand (receptive) and use (expressive) words to acquire and convey meaning
- Oral vocabulary supports the understanding of reading vocabulary

Impact of VI on Vocabulary

- Children with visual impairments may have a delay in vocabulary acquisition, but eventually acquire similar vocabulary bases as sighted children
- However, a visual impairment impacts the ability to acquire information visually, which is one of the primary sources of knowledge acquisition
- Therefore, conceptual understanding of words may be impacted, and figurative and idiomatic language may be more difficult
- Skilled readers have a robust vocabulary

Figure 5 Image of a female student and female teacher sitting next to each other at a table. The student is reading a book in braille as the teacher observes.

Figure 6 Image of a boy sitting at a table using a braille notetaker.
Reading Comprehension

- The complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between reader and text to convey meaning
- The goal of reading is to comprehend
- Readers with proficient comprehension:
  - Use a variety strategies before, during and after reading,
  - use different strategies for different texts at different places along the reading development continuum,
  - interact with the text in order to construct meaning.

Impact of VI on Reading Comprehension

- Children who are visually impaired may struggle with comprehension
- Contributing factors to reading comprehension difficulties include: low reading rates, limited vocabulary, lack of experiential knowledge, difficulty making connections
- Skilled readers are able to recall information, identify the main idea, relate reading to other information they have gathered, describe characters, and understand how an author uses language to convey important points

Figure 7 Image of a student and a teacher sitting across from each other at a table. Student is using an electronic tablet positioned upright in front of him.

Other areas explored in the book

- Motivation/Interest, Attention/Focus
- Prior Knowledge
- Memory
- Oral Language
- Sensory Processing

Figure 8 Image of a puzzle in the shape of a circle divided into 11 pieces. The word Reading is written inside the middle puzzle piece. All other pieces have a question mark inside them.
What Makes a Reader Proficient?

- Development of phonemic awareness
- Understanding of letter-sound correspondence
- Fluency based on automatic recognition of letter-sound relationships
- Automatic recognition of sight words
- Rich vocabulary
- Because of a solid foundation in reading skills, proficient readers have more cognitive resources to focus on comprehension.

Moats (1998)

Characteristics of Struggling Readers

- Over reliance on guessing strategies
- May have low language skills
- Limited phonemic awareness
- Limited understanding of phonics
- Memory problems
- Read slowly and hesitantly, or not at all
- Limited understanding about the text they read
- Often become frustrated and avoid reading

Moats (1998)

PAIR-SHARE! What are your experiences?

- Turn to your neighbor and discuss:
- -What have been your experiences with your students' reading?

Figure 9 Image of a female student and female teacher sitting next to each other at a table. The student is reading a book in braille as the teacher observes.
How do we apply what we know about reading to individual students?

Figure 10 Image of a female teacher and sitting next to a female student who is reading a print book at a table. The student reads the book while the teacher observes.

- Evaluating the Current Reading Program
  - How is reading being taught?
  - Who teaches reading? And how are they addressing reading skills?
  - Is the program balanced? Structured? Explicit? Consistent?
  - Are the accommodations appropriate?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

Evaluation of Current Reading Instruction Form

Figure 11 Image of a document titled “Evaluation of Current Reading Instruction”.

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PAIR-SHARE! What are your experiences?

- Turn to your neighbor and discuss:
  - How has a visual impairment impacted your students’ reading program and the services you provide?
  - How do current reading programs address the major components of reading?

Figure 12 Image of a boy looking at and utilizing an electronic tablet.

Evaluating each individual’s skills

- Conduct a review of records
- Assess the essential components
- Conduct additional assessments
- Review the data and identify strengths and areas of need
- Create an instructional plan

Designing an instructional program

Figure 13 Image of a document titled Kamei-Hannan Reading Instruction Planning Tool. The document is broken down into 3 parts: 1) specific skill areas, 2) literacy medium or media, instructional strategies, adaptations, accommodations and 3) data collection, reflection and planning.
PAIR-SHARE! What are your experiences?

- Turn to your neighbor and discuss:
  - How has a visual impairment impacted your students’ reading skills?
  - What are some of the specific areas of focus in the instructional programs of your students?

![Image of a boy looking at and utilizing an electronic tablet.](image)

**Figure 14** Image of a boy looking at and utilizing an electronic tablet.

**Meet Alejandro**

- 7 years old
- Spanish is his home language
- He is conversationally fluent in English
- Anophthalmia, with prosthetic eyes
- Braille reader

Let’s take a look at data from an assessment of the current reading program and individual data.

**Slide 28**

Alejandro is in a resource room for students with visual impairments four days a week for part of the school day. In the resource room, he works specifically on reading for 90 minutes per session, spelling and writing for 30 minutes per session, and math for 60 minutes per session. Alejandro is mainstreamed for the rest of the school day, mainly for science, physical education, and social studies lessons. Ms. Reyes, the resource teacher, uses the Primary reading curriculum. This literacy curriculum includes instructional materials that develop oral language and comprehension, phonemic awareness, decoding skills (phonics, analogy, context, and word recognition), fluency, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, and grammar. Alejandro’s literacy lessons take place in very small groups of no more than three children. The lessons are designed to build on each other over the course of the school year.

**Slide 29**

Based on Reading Assessment, Alejandro did well with letter recognition and letter-sound correspondence. He is able to read most words with 3 or 4 letters, including words with short vowel and long vowel sounds. However, he struggles with words with consonant blends (such as fl, and st), r-controlled sounds (when a vowel is followed by the letter r, such as ar and er), and digraphs (a combination of two letters representing a single sound, such as ph or ch). Alejandro also is able to read many high-frequency words, which assist him in reading connected text. He is able to read one or two sentences consecutively but has difficulty with reading assignments longer than about 50 words. He has strong verbal skills that appear to have supported good vocabulary acquisition. He also says he enjoys audiobooks, but he gets bored with them. His teacher reports that his limited attention span reduces the time he is willing to dedicate to reading or listening.
What can we do

- What do you think about Alejandro’s current reading program?
- Based on his individual assessment, what do we know?

Activities for Alejandro

What’s in my bucket?

Word Web

What’s in My Box

Choose a letter-sound correspondence to study for the activity and call it the letter of the day. Put the objects that begin with the same sound and a few items that begin with a different sound in a box. Ask the student, “What’s in my box?” and have the student select an object from the box. Ask the student to name the object and say whether or not the object begins with the sound of the letter of the day. The activity continues until all of the objects are named and sounds and letters are identified.
What’s in my box?

Figure 18 Image of a rectangular box.

Word Web

Present a familiar word to a student (such as read) and ask the student to generate new, multisyllabic words by adding inflectional endings, prefixes, and suffixes (student must already be familiar with these terms) to the word. As the student generates new words, create a diagram of the cluster of words. After finishing the diagram, ask the student to read each new word and discuss how the affixes changed or expanded upon the meaning of the root word. The student can then use these words in their writing as well.

Can you name any words that have “fill” in them?

Figure 19 Graph depicting Word Web, The word “fill” is written in the middle. Seven blank boxes are connected surrounding the middle box.

Jump Up and Clap!

Figure 20 Image of hands clapping together

Thank you!

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Figure 21 TSBVI logo.

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