Emerging Literacy Instruction for Students with Complex Communication Needs

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Land Acknowledgement

The Ontario Human Rights Recommendations

Universal Design
Accessible, evidence-informed instruction for all learners in the classroom

Reading Interventions
Flexible, inclusive, scientific, and timely interventions for those at risk

Accommodations
Timely implementation of effective technological & other accommodations

Early Screening
Use of effective measures to identify struggling readers, who need more support not later than the end of grade 1

Assessment
Specialized assessments (e.g., psycho-educational) should be provided to those who struggle despite high-quality support

OSLA (Dec 2021). The Right to Read: how Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists can support OHRC recommendations for Ontario students. Slide deck prepared by OSLA (slide 6)
“students with other disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, hearing disabilities, vision disabilities, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) also struggle with reading for many of the same reasons as students with reading disabilities.

They face many of the barriers identified in this report and will benefit from the report’s recommendations.”


What happens when our students have Complex Communication Needs (CCN)?
“Are unable to communicate effectively using speech alone”

These are Students who...

Often present as
Not using speech to communicate or using repetitive (echolalic) speech
Having a limited vocabulary or words they recognize and use (or that can be understood by others)
unable to share their knowledge with others (not making comments or share information)
unable to demonstrate their vocabulary knowledge (not able to explain their understanding)

https://literacyforallinstruction.ca/
Building a Foundation for Literacy

Shared Reading
Shared Writing
Alphabet Knowledge and Phonological Awareness

Erickson and Koppenhaver (2020). Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write.

Shared Reading

It’s about developing the student’s interest and love of books

It’s not the skills the child develops but their interest to participate, engage and interact through literacy.

The enjoyment, while engaging with their communication partners, leads to active participation and interaction in learning activities.

Shared Reading

High Participation
Low Engangement
High Participation
High Engagement
Low Participation
Low Engagement
Low Participation
High Engagement

Shared Reading does NOT have to include

- reading every word on the page
- reading every page in the book
- correctly identifying anything on the page
- progressing through the book in page order
- showing comprehension of the story

Erin Sheldon, 2021. Class notes for Teaching Students with Complex Communication Needs (U of A), Module 5

Shared Reading DOES need to include

- enjoyment of the book
- enjoyment of each other
- enjoyment of language
- joint engagement between two people and a text
- There are invitations to engage more deeply with language, such as commenting and sharing opinions

Erin Sheldon, 2021. Class notes for Teaching Students with Complex Communication Needs (U of A), Module 5

Shared writing is how we teach children that what we say can be reduced to print. It teaches children that they are authors.

You have participated in shared writing if you have ever:

- Printed a note dictated by a child
- Written a caption on a child’s drawing
- Helped a student think of possible words to use in a sentence
- Offered a sentence starter to kickstart writing

Erin Sheldon, 2021. Class notes for Teaching Students with Complex Communication Needs (U of A), Module 4
Alphabet Knowledge and Phonological Awareness

- Letter name identification
- Letter sound identification
- Recognizing letter in text (appearance of letter)
- Rhyme recognition
- Recognizing sounds in words

Goal of instruction in the Alphabetic Principle

"teach students to apply their knowledge of letters and letter sounds rather than targeting identification, matching, and mastery through direct instruction and repeated trials."


Robust Communication System

- Large amount of vocabulary
- Vocabulary that represents various parts of speech (not limited to nouns)
- Contains Core Vocabulary (frequently occurring across environments) as well as fringe (specific to a context)
The Reading Rope

Language Comprehension
- Background Knowledge
- Vocabulary Knowledge
- Language Structures
- Verbal Reasoning
- Literacy Knowledge

Skilled Reading
- Fluency
- Strategic
- Coordination of Word Recognition and Text Comprehension

Word Recognition
- Phonological Awareness
- Decoding (and Spelling)
- Sight Recognition

Whole to Part Model
(Cunningham, 1993; Erickson, Koppenhaver & Cunningham, 2017)

How do emergent and conventional literacy intersect

Language & literacy develop as a continuum

- Early communicative
- Late communicative
- Emergent
- Early independent
- Late independent

Student will communicate, read, & write
- Use language & literacy to communicate across time & space & understand self, others, & world

Student will express, respond, initiate
- Use language to be heard
- Ask questions
- Reflect

Student will predict, relate, participate
- Make sense of a text
- Extend

Student will observe, experience, explore
- Choose models of language reading, and writing
- Explore language and culture
- Engage in meaningful activities
- Choose activities that match language and literacy

Eric Sheldon
At the Early Emergent Literacy stage, students will

**observe**

**experience**

**explore**

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**Student’s expected responses**

Observe models of language during shared reading and writing activities

Explore materials for reading and writing

- Babble and scribble
- Bang the books together and rip the pages
- Eat the crayons

Attend for short periods of time

Begin to engage and interact

share a like/dislike with their actions

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**Communication partner’s role**

The adult may not “Read” the story but point out something of interest on a page

Multiple pages may be flipped at one time or you may only be able to go through 1-2 pages

Introducing what a book is about

- Turn the page to get more information
- There are pictures to look at
- There are words

Student is learning that the text is being used to reflect words that can be spoken — and have meaning (seeing labels, seeing captions being added in discussions, etc.)

Model Communication using the student’s communication system
At the Emergent Literacy stage, students will **predict**, **prefer**, and **participate**.

**Student’s expected responses**
- Start to direct the reading or writing experience
  - Bang on keyboard
  - Scribble with crayons
  - Turn pages in the book
- Engage and interact during familiar literacy routines
- Develop and express preferences – likes and dislikes – for different books and activities

**Communication partner’s role**
- Let the student's preferences guide the activity – and add information
- Connect with the student regarding their interests – share information about that item of interest (ex. vocabulary building, relate to past experience of theirs or relate it to yourself)
- Continue to provide opportunities to see that text shares a message – and start to point out familiar words, letters and sounds
At an emergent level, word work will focus on phonemic awareness with activities created to bring attention to

- rhyme (word endings),
- rhythm (to support memory/recall)
- repetition
- alliteration (word onsets)
- predictability

https://literacyforallinstruction.ca/alphabet-phonological-awareness/

At the late Emergent Literacy stage, students will

express
respond
initiate

Student’s expected responses

Make comments, Ask questions, Answer questions
Attent to text and story for its own sake
Attent to the text as a whole – not just to a page
Begin to talk, write, draw and read to express and share meaning with familiar partners
Communication partner’s role

Expand on the student’s understanding of what is happening in the story through

- supporting understanding of vocabulary
- relating information to their personal experiences
- Providing opportunities to use reason, problem solving and other critical thinking skills
- Model use of language structures that the student is not using (expand on their responses)

Can use information gathering questions – but not testing ones!

Communication partner’s role (con’t)

Provide the student with opportunities to offer their input into writing activities using sentence starters, familiar structure (ex. I see...), their name, etc.

Students can also be supported in tasks to sequence words to complete a response or to complete an open-ended question (use their AAC system or word cards to complete a response)
Oelwein Approach

Part 1: Words  

Part 2: We have words! What do we do with them
- Grammar and sentence construction
- Books
- Reading comprehension
- Composition and creative writing

Part 3: Working from Whole to Parts
- Sound and symbol association
- Teaching word families
- Spelling

Interaction precedes Communication

Communication precedes Symbol Development

Symbol Development precedes Language Development

Emergent literacy is a relatively “low stakes” intervention involving literacy activities that are relatively easily implemented: reading stories with children, providing basic technologies for communication and reading/writing access, and prompting exploration of print materials (p. 273)

Students with Complex Communication Needs have a Right to Literacy Instruction

The inquiry is not just about an equal right to read – it is about an equal right to a future.
Resources

Literacy Instruction for Students with Significant Disabilities -
https://literacyforallinstruction.ca/

Caroline Musselewhite’s site (lots of Resources) -
http://www.aacintervention.com/

Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium - https://erlc.ca/ (resources)
Resources to support CCN Population
https://arpdresources.ca/consortia/complex-communication-needs-ccn/

Jane Farrall
Training courses, blogs and video clips (especially one on systematic sequential phonics)
https://www.janefarrall.com/

Resources – page 2

Project Core - http://www.project-core.com/
Professional Development modules on communication and using Core Vocabulary – also: “Teaching Communication During Academic Instruction, *“Shared Reading”, “Predictable Chart Writing”, “Alphabet Knowledge and Phonological Awareness”*

Dynamic Learning Maps –
https://www.dlmpd.com/all-modules-in-alphabetical-order/

Beginning Communicators -
https://cqlatitudinal.com/form/SV_1YOwPjAT5F2ZNS7YyIJE=jqdg

Shared Reading -
https://cqlatitudinal.com/form/SV_9usEaoa8FAMqDPYQIJE=jqdg

Also have ones on Speaking and Listening, Symbols, Whoa re Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities, Teaching Text Comprehension – and many more

Resources – page 3

PRC – Satillo AAC Literacy Planners

2021 (Chapter Books) -
2022 -
2023 -
Resources - page 4

Janice Light
Literacy Instruction (Janice Light) - https://aacliteracy.psu.edu/index.php/page/show/id/15/index.html
AAC Learning Center Moodle [Penn State University] - https://aac-learning-center-moodle.psu.edu/

Dr. Laura Clark
Reading and Writing 4 All - https://sites.google.com/view/emergingreaders/home