

Overview of Literacy for Students with Significant Intellectual Disabilities

WAVES Symposium
March 25, 2021

Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project Literacy Initiative

1

Communication

Foundation for literacy of pre-symbolic and early symbolic learners. Students who do not use speech, signs or symbols to communicate in flexible ways.

2

Emergent Literacy

Exposure to literacy activities for students who are not yet able to meaningfully participate in conventional literacy activities.

3

Conventional Literacy

Literacy activities for students who know most of their letters, engage actively in shared reading, have a means of communicating and interacting and understand that writing involves letters and words.

Historical Assumptions

Students with cognitive disabilities

- need life skills and not academics
- can't learn to read
- may have complex communication skills that will prevent them from communicating conventionally

What we know now...

Learning

- Cognitive disabilities affect intellectual ability, metacognition, long and short term memory of an individual
- These students learn more slowly.
- Generalizing skills is more difficult.
- They need repetition in order to learn.

Communication

- 35% of these students have complex communication needs.
- These students can acquire symbolic communication skills.
- Most of these students receive instruction in using AAC from an SLP.
- Based on a report from ASHA, most of these students receive less than one hour per week of speech language services.
- The amount of instruction in communication received does not meet the intensity level needed in order for students with intellectual disability and complex communication needs to acquire flexible symbolic language.

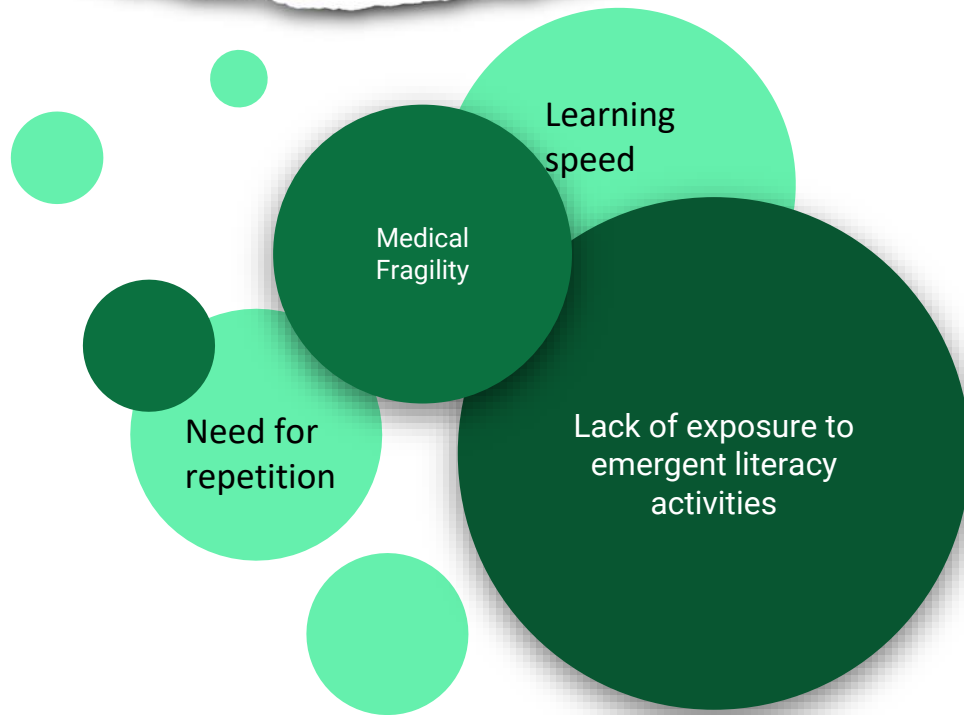
Reading

- Students with intellectual disabilities are frequently not considered to have the potential to be literate.
- When students do receive reading instruction, it typically focuses on learning sight words.
- Integrating traditional reading instruction (alphabetic awareness, phonics, phonemic awareness, etc.) into educational programs for students with intellectual disabilities results in increased independent reading skills for some students.
- Research shows some of these students when provided with instruction and supports can learn to decode.
- Reading skills can increase for students with intellectual disability throughout their lives.

We are going to operate with
only one assumption...

**all children can develop literacy
skills.**





How do we create the foundation for literacy?



1. Knowledgeable others
2. Means of communication and interaction
3. Repetition with variety
4. Cognitive engagement
5. Cognitive clarity
6. Personal connection to the curriculum
7. Encouragement of risk taking
8. Comprehensive instruction
9. Significant time allocation
10. High Expectations

Communication

Hillside Developmental Center



The first step is a comprehensive evaluation.

- Vision
- Hearing
- Learning media
- Gross and fine motor skills
- Communication abilities
- Access Technology
































Core Vocabulary

- Relatively small number of words
- Frequently used words
- Words which can apply to all subjects and topics
- Words which can be used across environments

Universal Core Vocabulary

all	help	not	turn
can	here	on	up
different	I	open	want
do	in	put	what
finished	it	same	when
get	like	she	where
go	look	some	who
good	make	stop	why
he	more	that	you

Universal Core Vocabulary

like 	want 	get 	make 	good 	more 	
not 	go 	look 	turn 	help 	different 	
I 	he 	open 	do 	put 	same 	
you 	she 	that 	up 	all 	some 	
it 	here 	in 	on 	can 	finished 	
where 	what 	why 	who 	when 	stop 	



turn

open

open

| + open

open

| + open

open + it

open

I + open

open + it

help + open + it

So how do we teach students to use core vocabulary?

- Provide access to AAC at all times for student use and teacher demonstration
- Closely observe student behaviors/actions and attribute meaning
- Encourage but not require communication

kicking

turning away

Click

Body Movements

closing eyes

reaching

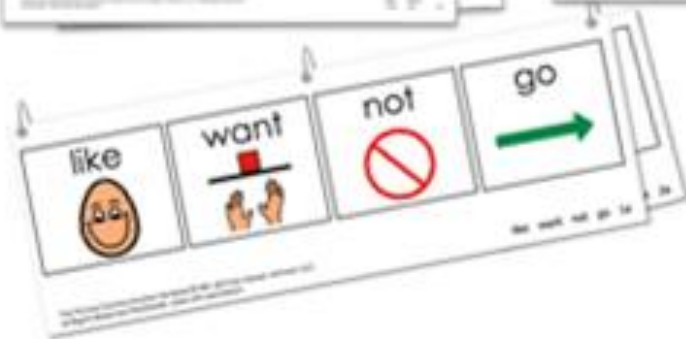
Pre-intentional Communication

Attribute Meaning

Symbolic Communication

Student Access to Core Vocabulary





Communication Matrix

www.communicationmatrix.org








*by Dr. Charity Rowland of Oregon Health & Science University
(original 1990, revisions in 1996 and 2004)*

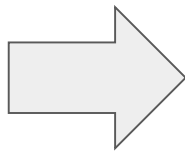
Aided Language Input



The most effective learning takes place when the student initiates a behavior.

When this occurs there is a surge of electrical activity in the brain.

like 	want 	get 	make 	good 	more 	
not 	go 	look 	turn 	help 	different 	
I 	he 	open 	do 	put 	same 	
you 	she 	that 	up 	all 	some 	
it 	here 	in 	on 	can 	finished 	
where 	what 	why 	who 	when 	stop 	



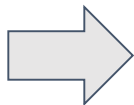
Emergent Literacy

Does the student...

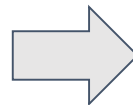
- Know most of the letters of the alphabet most of the time?
- Engage actively during shared reading?
- Have a means of communication and interaction?
- Understand that writing involves letters and words?

When do literacy skills progress?

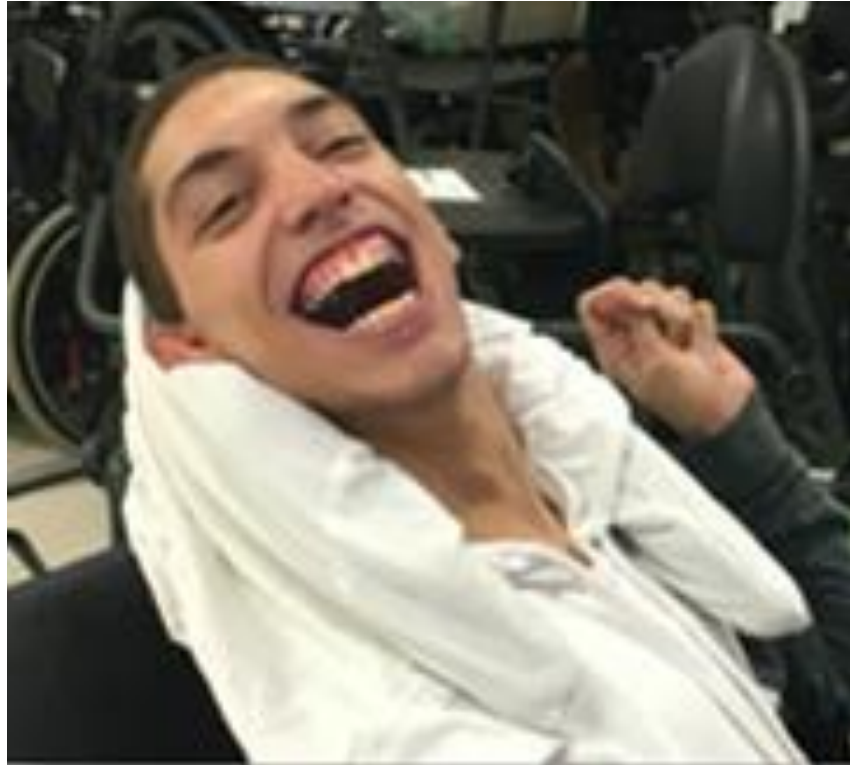
When students engage directly with the world.



When students explore related print or braille in order to gain understanding of its forms, functions and uses.



When students interact with others who are literate so they can see how it all works.



Emergent literacy instruction needs to provide students with

- Quantity
- Quality
- Frequency
- Variety

How?

- Skill development
- Integrated communication and literacy activities
- Use of print in meaningful contexts
- Independent exploration of reading and writing tools and materials

Structured Literacy Activities

- Shared Reading
- Shared Writing
- Instruction in Alphabetic Knowledge and Phonemic Awareness
- Independent Reading
- Independent Writing

Shared Reading



The foundation for shared reading is interaction.



Key components of shared reading...

- Everyone has access to their own communication system
- Maximize interaction
- Make connections from the book to the student's experiences
- Make comments, don't ask questions
- As much as possible students need to direct the conversation
- Read and the pause and wait for students to respond

We want to select books that are:

- Short
- Have appropriate language complexity
- Interesting to the student

Shared Writing

Cold Outside

1. I put on a hat. Sarah
2. I put on a coat. Troy
3. I put on a hat. Fareed
4. I put on a coat. Ben
5. I put on boots. Kiana
6. I put on gloves. Liam
7. I put on a hat. Tori

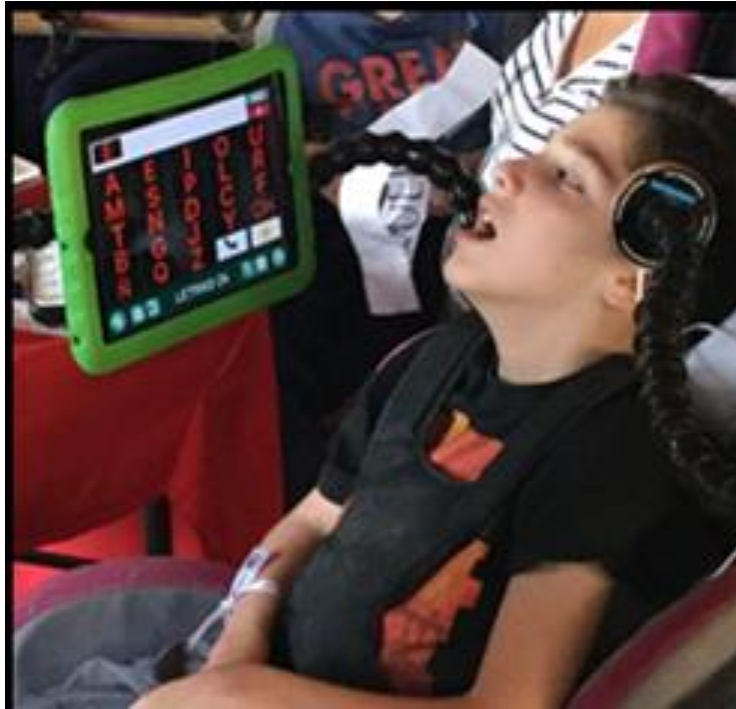
5 Steps in Predictable Chart Writing

1. Writing the chart
2. Rereading and working with the chart
3. Reading, cutting apart and rebuilding the individual sentences
4. Playing the game of “Be the Sentence”
5. Making a book using the sentences from the chart and reading it together.

Key components of predictable chart writing...

- The sentence stem is the most important part.
- Using core vocabulary in the stem allows for repetition of the powerful, abstract words.
- The repeated writing of these sentences, with the same words lined up all the way down the chart helps develop print concepts.
- It builds early skills in word identification, spelling, capitalization and punctuation.
- The resulting books provide familiar and motivating texts for classroom use.

Alphabetic and Phonemic Awareness



Alphabetic Awareness

- Shapes of uppercase letters
- Shapes of lowercase letters
- How upper and lowercase letters are related to each other
- How to make or select each letter for writing

Alphabetic Awareness

- Use of alphabet books
- Use of letters in the environment
- Playing with letter shapes
- Card games with alphabet cards
- Using student names
- Letter of the day structure

Phonological Awareness

Ability to identify sounds

- Hearing the difference between words
- Recognition of syllables
- Initial sound recognition
- Recognize rhyming words
- Understand that words that rhyme usually end in the same way.

Phonological Awareness

- Raps
- Rhymes
- Poems
- Tongue twisters

Independent Reading



Key considerations for independent reading

- Have a wide variety of reading materials
- Connect kids with books that are of interest to them
- Reading materials must be accessible
- Materials should be age respectful and ability appropriate



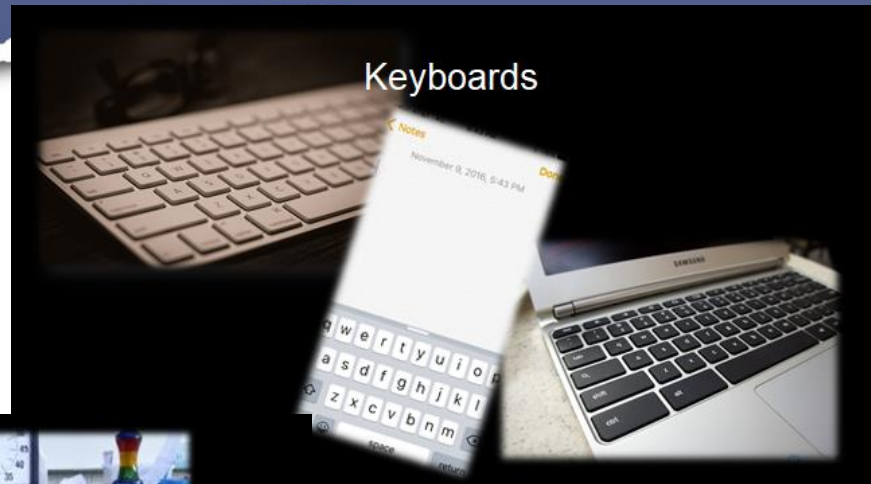
Independent Writing



Learning to write provides the opportunity
for unlimited expression.

Key considerations for independent writing

- We want to support students in getting their thoughts on paper.
- We need to provide a meaningful context for written expression
- Even when student seem to be randomly scribbling, they are producing text that we can acknowledge and talk about.



Keyboards



Provide students with

- A way to write
- Interesting and meaningful topics
- Time to write
- Meaningful responses to their writing



Conventional Literacy

Primary Goal

Teach students to read silently with understanding.

Comprehensive Literacy Instruction

- Word Identification
- Whole Text Print Processing
- Language Comprehension

If you are interested in participating in professional development and coaching support in communication, emergent or conventional literacy for students with significant intellectual disabilities, please contact:

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