Literacy for Students with Significant Disabilities

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Most literacy programs designed for students with severe disabilities:

- Are “drill and kill” word level activities
- Rarely involve reading or listening to text
- More rarely involve composing text
- Are decontextualized
- Use repetition, repeated trials and mastery focused instruction

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995; Erickson, 2009)

Typically only address single areas, or only a few areas.

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(Erickson, 2009)
Limits to Repeated Trial, Mastery Focused Instruction

- Doesn’t generally address all areas of literacy development
- Difficulty with generalization to authentic texts
- Doesn’t address needed content area knowledge
- Not motivating or engaging
- Not addressing LANGUAGE DISABILITY

Erickson found in a study in an urban school district, 52% of students with disabilities in the school system struggled with reading because of language comprehension difficulties, while only 32% had word identification difficulties.

Balanced Literacy

- Teaches students to apply skills across contexts
- Repeated exposure to skills for variety of texts and purposes
- Integrates reading, writing and oral language
- Provides explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts.

(Fountas & Pinnell, 2001)

How do teachers get trained?

- Literacy Leaders
- Literacy Fundamentals

Or . . .

[http://www.esc3.net/content/view/622/842/](http://www.esc3.net/content/view/622/842/)
COMMONLY USED SPECIAL EDUCATION READING PROGRAMS: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

Across the state of North Carolina, school systems are answering the call of the No Child Left Behind legislation and systematically addressing the literacy learning needs of their students with disabilities. They have individually and collectively responded to the suggestion that students who struggle to learn to read require instruction that addresses the following: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. For students with disabilities, the result has been the systematic adoption of remedial reading programs that address these areas.

Five different programs are used most commonly across North Carolina: Reading Mastery/Corrective Reading, Language!, the Wilson Reading System, The Hill Methodology, and Saxon Reading. These programs all meet the requirement of addressing the five primary areas, but they do so in different ways and with different levels of emphasis. In addition to these five programs, a sixth program is used widely with students with significant disabilities across the state; it is the Edmark Reading Program. The purpose here is to provide you with a brief summary of the six programs based on the companies’ own descriptions.

While we have learned a great deal about effective reading instruction for students with disabilities, it will never be possible to have a single program that meets the needs of every student. We will always have to understand an individual student’s needs and find a program that best meets those needs. We hope this document helps you with the latter part as you attempt to meet the literacy learning needs of the students in your life.

A few words about reading

Reading is a complex process. It requires the integration of many skills as well as the ability to call upon relevant background knowledge to support understanding. Successful reading requires the automatic recognition of most words as they appear in real text, not individually on flash cards. It also requires the ability to figure out words that can’t be recognized automatically. While the two word reading skills — word identification and phonics/decoding — are vital to reading, they are only a small part of the whole picture. Successful reading requires knowledge of the structures of text such as the knowledge that stories have a beginning, middle, and end, as well as characters, settings, and plots. In addition to understanding text structures, readers must have sufficient oral language comprehension to understand the language that is presented in the text. Finally, readers must be able to hold words in their working memory long enough to process the meaning of sentences, paragraphs, and entire texts. They must be able to move their eyes across the page efficiently and go back effortlessly to recheck a word to support comprehension.

The complexity of reading means that there could be any number of reasons that an individual student struggles to learn to read. The solutions are not going to be one-size fits all, so we must be prepared to understand just what size our students need and where we go to find it.

The program descriptions provided here are taken directly from each program’s website. For more information, refer to the websites provided.

Reading Mastery (SRA, McGraw-Hill)

“Reading Mastery I” [kindergarten level] teaches basic decoding and comprehension skills. Intensive, explicit phonics instruction helps beginning readers master letter sounds, begin to sound out words, and use these words immediately as they read stories. Reading Mastery II [first grade level] expands basic reading skills developed in Level I. Strategies for decoding difficult words and answering interpretive comprehension questions are introduced. Reading Mastery III [second grade level] focuses on the development of reasoning skills, building background
knowledge, and higher order comprehension skills.”

Corrective Reading (SRA, McGraw-Hill)

“Corrective Reading provides intensive intervention for students in Grades 4-12 who are reading one or more years below grade level.

Corrective Reading Decoding. “For students who have difficulty reading accurately and fluently. Level A: Word Attack Basics (65 lessons) teaches non-readers the relationship between the arrangement of letters in a word and its pronunciation. Level B: Decoding Strategies (B1, 65 lessons; B2, 65 lessons) refines and applies word-attack skills to more difficult sound combinations and words. These skills are applied in stories of increasing length and more complex syntax. Level C: Skill Applications (125 lessons) bridges the gap between advanced word-attack skills and the ability to read textbooks.”

Corrective Reading Comprehension. “For students who read without understanding, the Corrective Reading Comprehension programs develop vocabulary, information, and comprehension strategies needed for academic success. Level A: Thinking Basics (65 lessons) teaches basic reasoning skills that form the framework for learning information. It also fills crucial gaps in students' background knowledge. Level B: Comprehension Skills (B1, 60 lessons; B2, 65 lessons) teaches literal and inferential comprehension strategies. Level C: Concept Applications (140 lessons) teaches students to use thinking skills independently.”

The Hill Methodology (www.hillcenter.org)

The Hill Methodology is based on applied behavioral analysis and precision teaching techniques. Developed for their intensive work with students who have learning disabilities and/or attention deficit disorder, the methods emphasize fluent reading and word identification.

Language! (Sopris West Educational Services)

“A comprehensive literacy intervention curriculum … “LANGUAGE! is not a grade-level curriculum; rather, students enter at their initial proficiency levels via the Placement Test, and their progress depends on their understanding, application, and mastery of the concepts in each unit of study.”

Saxon Phonics (Saxon Publishers)

“Explicit, systematic phonics instruction allows students to develop the foundational skills necessary to achieve a lifetime of successful reading. Our phonics programs provide students with the tools needed for this success…

Participant Resource Guide
Module 8
The Edmark Reading Program (Riverdeep Publishing)

“The Edmark Reading Program teaches beginning reading and language development to nonreaders and those who have been unsuccessful using other programs. Using a whole word approach, both the print and software versions teach recognition and comprehension of words for students with developmental or learning disabilities and ESL students. Students find success following a process that teaches sight recognition of a word, introduces its meaning, provides comprehension practice, and uses the word in story context. Carefully planned introduction of words and evolution of sentence structure also promote language development.”

(http://www.riverdeep.net/products/edmark_reading_program/index.jhtml)

The Wilson Reading System (Wilson Language Training Corp)

The Wilson Reading System “directly teaches the structure of words in the English language so that students master the coding system for reading and spelling...The basic purpose of the Wilson Reading System is to teach students fluent decoding and encoding skills to the level of mastery...Students work from sounds to syllables to words to sentences to stories to books, learning the structure of English through constant repetition and review. Each step builds on the previous one. Steps 1-6 give students the basics - sounds, sound blends, and fundamental syllabication rules - establishing a solid foundation. Steps 7-12 cover sound options, spelling rules, morphological principles, and other advanced concepts. Students learn concepts thoroughly, and learn what they need when they need it.”

(http://www.wilsonlanguage.com/w_about.htm)

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