Now that I can read and write I can get a good job”: Teaching reading and writing to children with a developmental disability

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Autism, participation and learning focus on preschool and school
Overview of today's session

• Headsprout Early Reading
• Adapted Handwriting without Tears
How are children with a developmental disability doing in school when it comes to learning to read?
Why are they underperforming?

• Teachers may struggle to know how best to teach reading
• Children may have fewer opportunities to learn
• Teachers may have low expectations
“The key to solving the student achievement gap is implementing evidence-based practice with fidelity.”

Stevan J. Kukic, Ph.D., Director, School Transformation National Centre for Learning Disabilities
A summary of reading research

Need to consider:

1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught
2. Methods of instruction
1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught

Five critical areas of reading:

1. Phonemic awareness
2. Phonics
3. Vocabulary
4. Fluency
5. Text comprehension

National Reading Panel, 2000
1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught

Systematic reviews (e.g., Browder et al, 2006)

- NRP guidelines not included
- Few evaluations of comprehensive reading programmes
- Sight reading focus
1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught

Why is using the sight-reading approach so popular?

• Default reading strategy for “visual learners”
• Early Success
  - alphabet
  - simple words
What are the drawbacks with teaching sight reading?

• The method soon fails
• Simply too many words to recognise by sight
• Confidence collapses and children fall further behind

1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught
2. Methods of effective reading instruction

Reading instruction needs to be more:

**Explicit**

- Sequential, comprehensive instruction
- Not leaving anything to chance

**Intensive**

- Many more learning opportunities
- Repeated practice important

*e.g., Browder and Spooner, 2006*
Overview of Headsprout Early Reading
What is Headsprout Early Reading?

• Commercially available internet-based reading programme

• **80 episodes** (average 20 minutes)
1. Content, knowledge and skills to be taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>Recognising words are made up of different sounds, and being able to manipulate these sounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Learning how these sounds correspond to letters</td>
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<td>Oral reading fluency</td>
<td>Fluently reading (accurately and with speed) text with expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Understanding words in text through linking with oral vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Directly teach strategies to comprehend text</td>
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2. Methods of effective reading instruction

Teaching strategies have extensive empirical support:

• Explicit, systematic and intensive instruction

• Adaptive instruction and error correction, responds to each individual learner


How do we know that HER is effective?

- Research programme at Bangor University and Warwick university spanning more than a decade
- Effective with young children, adolescents and adults with DD
- Parents can be trained to support children with the programme - not just school-based delivery
- Can improve reading skills for non-verbal children too
- Can improve reading for children with moderate to severe developmental disabilities
- Two RCTs show that Headsprout is more effective than “reading as usual”
What is Handwriting without Tears?

- A comprehensive handwriting curriculum for foundation year (Pre-K) up to Year 6 (5th Grade)
- Designed by an Occupational Therapist
Capitals first

- All start at the top
- All the same size
- All the same position
Grouping Letters

- Letters are taught in groups of similar formation

Frog Jump Capitals
F E D P B R N M

Starting Corner Capitals
H K L U V W X Y Z

Center Starting Capitals
C O Q G S A I T J
Wood Pieces
- Big line
- Little line
- Big curve
- Little curve
- Same as uppercase
- Magic c (including d)
- Transition group (rest of vowels & similar capitals)
- Diver letters (including b)
- Final group
Adaptations for children with a developmental disability – adapted HWT manual

• Condensed version of the programme
• Skills broken down further
• Suggestions for prompting and prompt fading
• Data collection suggestions
• Mastery criterion described
How do we know that adapted- HWT is effective?

- It’s early days but preliminary research suggests that adapted HWT can be effective at teaching handwriting and early drawing skills
- Teachers and Teaching Assistants can be trained to deliver
- Can be used as a “first” handwriting curriculum for young children or as a “catch up” for older children
- Can be used as an individualized handwriting programme or delivered to small groups
Before

After
THANKS FOR LISTENING!
IT'S TIME FOR QUESTIONS!

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