Beyond Handwriting: Supporting Literacy in EI and Schools
Dottie Handley-More, MS, OTR/L, Jan Hollenbeck, OTD, OTR/L, Meira Orentlicher, PhD, OTR/L

**Literacy Initiatives** (Handley-More, Hollenbeck, Orentlicher, & Wall, 2013)
- NCLB placed a greater emphasis on achievement in literacy requiring school districts to make adequate yearly progress in student achievement
- The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program provides state grants to support literacy improvement for all children from birth through 12th grade.
- The Common Core State Standards for reading expect all students to read, comprehend, and analyze literary and informational texts. The Standards for writing expect all students to express opinions, narrate events, and share information through writing (CCSSI, 2015).

**Stages of Literacy Development** (Clark & Bainter, 2013; Dunst, et al, 2006).
- **Preliteracy**: Development of joint attention, nonverbal communication, vocalizations, perception of speech & language, recognizing & understanding pictures, handling books, listening
- **Emergent Literacy**: Development of first words, beginning conventional language (gaining attention, making requests, describing), vocabulary, language comprehension, recognition of symbols & print, beginning understanding of the function of print
- **Early Literacy**: Development of fundamental literacy skills including understanding that word units are made of sounds or phonemes, analyzing & playing with language, letter & word recognition, & invented spelling
- **Conventional Literacy**: Development of reading and writing skills including decoding words, reading out loud, reading and writing fluently, comprehending text, generating text, & spelling

**Key Early Literacy Skills** (NELP, 2008)
- **Alphabet Knowledge**: Knowing letter forms along with their names and sounds
- **Phonological Awareness**: Discriminating and manipulating the sounds associated with spoken language
- **Rapid Automatic Naming**: Rapidly naming sequences of letters, numbers, colors, or objects
- **Writing**: Writing letters on request & name writing
- **Phonological Memory**: Remembering orally presented information for a short length of time

**Literacy for Infants, Toddlers, and Young Children**
- Participation in early literacy activities can foster school readiness (Im, Osborn, Sánchez, & Thorp, 2007)
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that pediatric providers promote early literacy development from birth to at least kindergarten by advising parents of the benefits of reading aloud and providing guidance about shared-reading activities that are developmentally appropriate and enjoyable (High et al, 2014).

**Literacy for Primary Students**
- Formal literacy instruction, which typically begins in early elementary school, includes research-based instruction in foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, word decoding, spelling, handwriting, reading fluency, comprehension, and written expression (Learning First Alliance, 2000).

**Literacy for Older Children and Adolescents**
- Literacy for older students shifts from learning to read to developing advanced the literacy skills needed for using reading to expand their knowledge, analyze information, and develop opinions (Mernane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012).
• Writing informally as part of the learning process can help students learn subject area content and improve how they write to show what they know (NCTE, 2007).
• “Motivation can determine whether adolescents engage with or disengage from literacy learning” (NCTE, 2007)
• Textbooks are typically designed for average to above readers (Higgins, Boone, & Lovett, 2002).

Literacy for Students with Disabilities:
• Literacy skills increase opportunities to engage more fully in the community (Copeland & Keefe, 2007).
• Literacy experiences of children with disabilities often occur less frequently and differ qualitatively compared to students without disabilities (Hanser, 2010).
• Literacy instruction for students with severe disabilities should include increased access to literature and increased independence as a reader (Browder, et al 2009)
• Writing activities for students with moderate to severe disabilities have traditionally consisted of tracing and copying rather than writing to communicate original ideas (Sturm, 2012).
• Evidence-based instructional strategies can improve the writing skills of students with developmental disabilities (Sturm, 2012)
• Occupational therapists can support literacy development by identifying ways for children with disabilities to "easily access and explore reading and writing" (Hanser, 2010, p. 20).

Questions to Ponder: How are you supporting literacy in early intervention settings, preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school?

• How do you support access to reading activities for your students with disabilities?

• How do you help your students move beyond just copying and tracing to help them actually share their thoughts?

• What technology tools do you use to support literacy?

• How do you collaborate with teachers to support literacy?

• What additional training might OTs need to better support literacy initiatives?

References:


**Additional Resources:**

- Books Build Connections toolkit from American Academy of Pediatrics ([https://littoolkit.aap.org/Pages/home.aspx](https://littoolkit.aap.org/Pages/home.aspx))
- Center for Early Literacy Learning ([http://earlyliteracylearning.org/index.php](http://earlyliteracylearning.org/index.php))
- Center for Literacy and Disability Studies ([http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/](http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/))
- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center ([http://ectacenter.org/topics/literacy/literacy.asp#other](http://ectacenter.org/topics/literacy/literacy.asp#other))

**Contact Information:**

Dottie Handley-More: Dottie.Handley-More@highlineschools.org