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A Process Approach to Teaching Braille Writing at the Primary Level

Swenson, A.M. (1991). *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 85 (5), 217-221.

Description of Article:

CONTEXT: This article describes the "process approach" to writing instruction as it has been modified and used effectively for teaching Braille writing to young children who are blind. This approach to teaching language arts includes "immersing students in print, giving students greater responsibility for learning, and integrating literacy skills with all areas of the curriculum (p.217)." Referred to as "reading-writing" classrooms, the ideas and teaching strategies utilized in a process approach are also proving to be highly effective in teaching Braille writing.

PRACTICE: In general, the process approach includes less rote skill-development exercises from reading, spelling, grammar and handwriting workbooks and more emphasis on students' extensive daily writing on topics they select. It is the students' involvement in the process of writing - drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing - that is of more concern to teachers than the final product. The author/vision teacher discusses the modified approach to Braille writing, providing samples of the work of primary-grade students enrolled in a combination self-contained-resource room for children with severe visual impairments. The children are mainstreamed into regular classes using a literature-based, process approach, with the vision teacher working closely with the regular education teachers.

While the writing program is continuing to evolve, the author describes a number of key components which form the basis for instruction. In summary form these include:

The children are exposed to a wide variety of excellent children's literature with the goal of developing "a feel for the rhythm and pattern of language that (they) will transfer to their writing (p. 217)." A whole language, literature-based language arts program is used that fully integrates Braille reading and writing experiences.

Students are immersed in print (Braille) and functional opportunities to read and write as much as possible. The invented spelling technique is encouraged since it provides the children freedom in choosing their topics and early confidence in their writing abilities. Reading and writing strategies are modeled by the teacher, with the children actively participating in assisting the teacher (alias fellow writer) before they are expected to attempt them on their own.

Materials for writing are readily available. The writer's message always takes precedence over mechanical considerations during the drafting phase of the process. Braille drafts are typically revised and proofed during student conferences with the vision teacher; opportunities are provided to share their writing with both sighted and blind peers. Grade 2 Braille is used from the beginning of reading and writing instruction. (pp. 217-218).

The author provides a discussion on writing in kindergarten and how, for students who are blind, it requires the development of physical skills necessary to operate the braillewriter, the cognitive skills required for independent creative writing, and an awareness of the many purposes of reading and writing Braille (p. 218). She describes in detail and provides illustrations of a sequence of learning skills

and concepts designed to develop independent writing abilities by the end of kindergarten. These include three stages: 1) Dictated writing/"talking writing;" 2) guided writing; and 3) independent writing.

The author then discusses issues pertinent to "the developing writer" as it involves the basic steps in the writing process: drafting, revising, proofreading and publishing. She notes that children who are blind often write drafts as easily as their sighted classmates, but then required additional assistance from a teacher who knows Braille during the revision, proofreading and publication stages. He offers strategies on how to support their progress. The learning involved in these stages is supplemented with "mini lessons" related, for instance, to their writing style or mechanical skills.

The author considers diversity in writing that results from exposure to a wide variety of children's literature and the introduction of primary-grade students to nonfiction ("information writing"), the techniques of interviewing, developing categories, taking notes, and constructing sentences from notes (p. 220)."

In her consideration of the assessment process, she emphasizes the need for the vision teacher to be responsible for the continuous assessment of students' progress in Braille reading and writing. She provides numerous suggestions that can be used to plan a student's writing program.

OUTCOMES/REFLECTIONS:

The author presents numerous results for children who learn to write Braille using a process approach, including:

- they develop positive attitudes toward writing, considering it not as a type of specific work assignment but as a multi-functional tool students make important decisions and subsequently feel in control of their learning
- they are not constrained to produce the perfect paper during drafting stage, they are more willing to take risks

- they accept revision as a part of the writing process and begin to think critically about their writing
- when writing frequently and publishing, students learn to make connections between reading and writing
- authorship generates interest and preferences in adult authors; students enjoy discussing books they read

In conclusion, the author finds the process approach as a highly effective way of teaching writing to children who are blind. Besides the immediate success reflected in students' enthusiasm and confidence, she finds the process "establishes a foundation for the development of future literacy skills, including the use of a talking word processor (p. 221)."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For more information about this resource, please contact:

Anna M. Swenson, M.Ed., vision teacher, self-contained/resource room for visually impaired students, Pine Springs Elementary School, 7607 Willow Lane, Falls Church, VA 22042.

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Read With Me!

By Louisa Brooke

Free Books

Anna's Book Angel Project
Seedlings Braille Books for Children
PO Box 51924
Livonia, MI 48151-5924
800-777-8552
www.seedlings.org

Drawings for free Braille books. Call them or fill out an application for your child online. See if your child's name comes up in a drawing for a free Braille book.

Braille Institute
Universal Media Services
741 North Vermont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90029
800-272-4553 www.brailleinstitute.org

Free books for preschoolers in the Braille Special Collection: the Dots for Tots story books. Call them and give them your child's name and address.

Xavier Society for the Blind
(A Funny Alphabet Book)
154 East 23 Street
New York, NY 10010-4595
212-473-7800

Xavier Society for the Blind carries one book which is free and made by a local group. It's a large print and Braille alphabet book with tactile pictures for your child to feel. Write a letter to the Xavier Society asking for a book for your child.

Have a favorite book at home you would like to have Brailled for your child? Ask your child's teacher if she or another teacher can Braille it for you.

Free to Borrow

New Mexico Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
1209 Camino Carlos Rey
Santa Fe, NM 87507
800-456-5515 www.stlib.state.nm.us

Call the NMBPH to get an application for your child to borrow print/Braille preschool books. In New Mexico we get our Braille books from Utah.

Ask the librarian to choose print/Braille books for your child, or you can choose books from the catalog they will send you. **Here is a list of books that preschoolers enjoy.**

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?
By Bill Martin, Jr.

Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother, Too?
By Eric Carle

There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly
By Simms Taback

Three Little Kittens
By Paul Galdone

The Very Busy Spider
By Eric Carle

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
By Eric Carle

Print/Braille Books Make Great Gifts!

American Printing House for the Blind
Family Life Catalog
800-223-1839 www.aph.org

Braille Institute
Catalog
800-272-4553 www.brailleinstitute.org

The National Braille Press
Catalog, Children's Braille Book Club
800-777-8552 www.seedlings.org

Sensational Books
Sadie Can Count, a tactile counting book
303-238-4760 www.sensationalbooks.com

Literacy Sources

The **Louis Braille Center** offers books in Braille for children and adults including some of Helen Keller's writings. 425-776-4042
lbc@loisbraillecenter.org

Garlic Press offers books about sign language and a book about Braille. With Braille for the Sighted, parents and siblings can learn the alphabet and numbers through several games and activities. 541-345-0063
www.garlicpress.com/cgi-bin/shop_gp.cgi

Lutheran Braille Workers, Inc. offers free Christian materials and bibles in Braille (including the NIV Bible). 909-795-8977 800-925-6062 www.lbwinc.org

ROPARD has a resource book called "looking Ahead: A Parent's Guide to the Development of their Child with Retinopathy of Prematurity" which is available through their website:
www.ropard.org

Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Philadelphia, PA Online Braille Bookstore makes available a catalog of Braille Books of classics and popular authors such as Steven King, Clive Clussler, Dean Koontz, and by Romance Queen and Sandra Brown. With most books ranging from \$15. to \$35., bound and shipped via free matter, the collection of books is affordable. All books are proofread and transcribed by certified Braille transcribers and proofreaders.
www.asb.org/bookstore.htm

Bookshare.org provides digital books in a broad range of subjects to United States residents who have a visual or other print disability. Books are in HTML, DAISY, text format and digital Braille. A downloadable DAISY reader is available for members. Requires completion of an online form, proof of disability and payment of a \$25. sign-up fee and a \$50. annual subscription.

Sources for Online Books

Accessible Book Collection provides high-interest, low-reading-level digital text in HTML to individuals with documented print disability. Annual subscription fee is \$49.95; school district licenses are available.

Alex offers a collection of free public domain material from American literature, English literature, and Western philosophy. Books are in PDF and text formats.

Audible offers 27,000 downloadable books, magazines, newspapers, radio shows. Items are spoken-word audio in a proprietary Audible.com format. Cost is \$14.95-21.95 per month.

Bartleby offers the classics of literature, nonfiction and reference books free of charge; includes the Harvard Classics, the complete works of Shakespeare and more. Some titles are offered in various proprietary e-book formats via amazon.com

Bibliomania.com makes available free online literature with over 2,000 classic texts, including fiction, drama, poetry, short stories and magazines. Also offers study guides and reference materials. Most books are in HTML format.

Braille Book Files has children's books at all grade levels submitted by teachers and transcribers; the site is maintained by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Access is password-protected and limited to individuals who have a visual or other print disability and to members of a nonprofit organization or government agency that provides specialized services to such individuals. Books are in MegaDots, Duxbury and ASCII format.

Looking for a Greeting Card?

The [American Printing House](http://www.apphouse.com) has Braille note cards, holiday cards, and birthday cards.
www.apphouse.com

Artistic Touch
2600 W. 28th St.
Sioux Fall, SD 57105
605-335-1736

Large print and Braille greeting cards with tactile designs

[Braille Enterprises](http://www.brailleenterprises.com) sells Braille greeting cards for Christmas, birthdays, and other holidays and special events.
<http://www.brailleenterprises.com/>

The [Foundation for Blind Children](http://www.thefbc.org) sells holiday cards in six different designs; each card has a message inside in both Braille and print. An on-line order form is available.
<http://www.thefbc.org/productsAndServices/holidayCards.html>

[Hallmark Cards](http://pressroom.hallmark.com/braille_cards.html) sells everyday greeting cards in both large print and Braille at its stores. Use the "store locator" and contact your local Hallmark to ask for LP and Braille greeting cards.
http://pressroom.hallmark.com/braille_cards.html

The [National Braille Press](http://www.nbp.org) sells tactile greeting cards with a variety of raised designs. The cards are Brailled with a personal message. <http://www.nbp.org/>

Prophecy Designs
Offers the only retail line of full-color greeting cards with both print and Braille. Vivid designs by artist Kristina M. L. Nutting grace the front of 30 various cards. Cards are also available in large print.
www.prophecydesigns@earthlink.net

[Shadows in the Dark](http://shadowsinthedark.com/) sells a wide variety of Brailled illustrated greeting cards for all occasions, in English as well as six other languages. Their site offers other gift items as well. <http://shadowsinthedark.com/>

Have You Seen These?

Need a cursor that is enlarged or animated for better visibility? Tired of trying to find that pesky little thing? Try these internet sites for free download cursors:

<http://rbx.de/big-cursors/>
<http://www.anicursor.com/special.html>
<http://joescursors.tripod.com/HVCurPg.htm>

International Children's Digital Library - a library that provides free access to children's books from around the world by ensuring access to books from many cultures and in diverse languages, visit:
<http://www.icdlbooks.org/>

"Web Toolboxes for Educators," compiled by Dr. Cheryl Wissick at the USC College of Education, this alphabetical listing of terrific educational resources can serve as a starting point on your search of the Web, provide interactive activities, informational resources, and lessons; and help with the integration of technology in education. One section of this web site would be of particular interest to special educators, with links for software related to web access, talking word processes, text-to-speech tools, found at:

<http://www.ed.sc.edu/caw/toolboxsource.html>
<http://www.ed.sc.edu/caw/toolboxvendors.html>

University of Virginia Library's Etext Center provides e-books including classic British and American fiction, major authors, children's literature, American history, Shakespeare, African-American documents, the Bible, and much more...1,800 publicly available e-books:

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/ebooklist.html>

International Children's Digital Library - a library that provides free access to children's books from around the world by ensuring access to books from many cultures and in diverse languages.
<http://www.icdlbooks.org/>

Upcoming Learning/Conference Opportunities

ACVREP is offering up to 11 hours of credit by taking on line courses. It is free for AER members through the website.

December 7

South West Autism Network
Introduction to Autism

For more information, visit:
customerservice@lorman.com

January 11, 2007

South West Autism Network
Strategies, Tips, and Techniques for
Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders
(ASD). For more information, visit:

customerservice@lorman.com

January 25, 2007

South West Autism Network
Understanding and Working with Persons
with ASD

For more information, visit:
customerservice@lorman.com

February 1, 2007

South West Autism Network
Social Development for Persons with ASD

For more information, visit:
customerservice@lorman.com

February 8, 2007

Understanding and Working with Persons
with ASD For more information, visit:

customerservice@lorman.com

February 15, 2007

Assessment, Communication & Visual
Supports for Persons with ASD

For more information, visit:
customerservice@lorman.com

Become a Braille Textbook Transcriber

Today, the United States needs at least 380 new Braille Textbook Transcribers. By 2012, that number will rise to an additional 1,020. The Northwest Vista College is offering a curriculum that is completed online. For more information visit:

<http://www.accd.edu/nvc/areas/braille>

Using Source Files: An AFB Online Course for Braille Transcribers

A self-directed professional development opportunity offered free of charge by the American Foundation for the Blind. This online course can help Braille transcribers update their skills with the latest techniques for translating textbooks and other instructional materials.

Bridging the Gap: Best Practices for Instructing Adults Who Are Visually Impaired and Have Low Literacy Skills

This free, on-line course is both self-paced and self-directed. It gives participants the freedom to select modules and topics that are relevant to them. It consists of six modules that are designed to provide an understanding of the social, legal, and practical issues when working with adults who have varying types and degrees of visual impairment and low literacy skills. This course also aims to familiarize participants with the full range of instructional theories, technologies, and resources they can draw upon for teaching literacy skills. No textbooks are required. The course is approved by ACVREP for continuing education (CE) hours."

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Name _____ Title/Organization _____

Address _____

Attention: Sherri Lyle • NMSBVI • PO BOX 5165 • Silver City • NM • 88062
FAX (505) 534-1310 • slyle@nmsbvi.k12.nm.us

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