Instructional Strategy – Multiple Challenges

Story-Based Lesson for Students with Significant Intellectual Disabilities and hearing loss

Teaching literacy to students with a severe disability who have intensive communication needs and hearing loss may be a challenge for educators. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), mandated academic skill development for all students, including those with significant disability (NCLB, 2002). Research conducted by Luckner, Slike, and Johnson (2012) suggest that teachers of the deaf should provide literacy instruction through concrete activities, such as using student's experiences for reading topics and providing direct instruction of vocabulary related to pictures and signs.

In the past, educators have focused on sight word instruction to teach literacy for students with significant cognitive disabilities. However, recent research suggests that the focus for teaching literacy to students with significant cognitive disabilities may be more successful using story-based lessons. Story-based lessons help teach skills such as comprehension, vocabulary, and text awareness in meaningful context. Story-based lessons allow for routine structured literacy instruction, which benefit students with significant intellectual disabilities. The following story-based steps and tips are taken from: *Modules Addressing Special Education and Teacher Education (MAST), East Carolina University.*

Story-based lesson in 10 easy steps
Once you have decided on a book, you will need to:
- Select key vocabulary from the book.
  - If using picture vocabulary, pair picture with word
  - Up to 5 vocabulary pictures/words per book
- Find repeated line or create one that tells main idea of the book or chapter.
- Select at least 3 comprehension questions with answers and distracters.
- Modify book as needed for student access.
- Pair words and story line with American Sign Language, generic hand signs, pictures, and/or objects.

Step One: Use anticipatory set
The anticipatory set is the presenting of an object or concept that can be understood through any of the **five senses**.   The anticipatory set may include:
- An object to be touched—(e.g., a stuffed animal or toy car);
- A food that can be experienced through taste or smell—(e.g., a lemon or a fortune cookie);
- An object that describes a concept—(e.g., an ice cube or a heart);
- A recording that represents a part of the story—(e.g., thunder or a mooing cow).

Step Two: Read the title
Students need the opportunity to interact with the book in a specific **sequence**. When presenting the title page of the book, use the word **"title"**.

Step Three: Read the author's name
When presenting the title page of the book, use the word **"author"** to describe the writer of the story.

Step Four: Ask a prediction question
Students **make a prediction** about what they think the story will be about or what they think will happen next. The front cover, anticipatory set, title, and pictures in the story can provide context clues that assist students in making a prediction.

Step Five: Model opening the book
Students with significant disabilities may not have had an opportunity to **"handle"** books. Show students the front, back, top, and bottom of the book; **model** how to open it. Next, present the **closed book** to student. Avoid directly telling the student to open the book.

Step Six: Text Pointing
Text pointing teaches the concept that the **words** on the page are **correlated to the pictures** in the book and story. It also reinforces the concept of reading from **left to right** and from **top to bottom.**

Step Seven: Identify vocabulary words
The vocabulary that you select for your story should include words that students must know in order to communicate effectively. These would be words that can be generalized to other settings such as "play" or "game." Your list should also include words that allow us to understand what is happening in the story. For example, the word "rumble" may not be commonly known but needs to be taught to understand what is happening in the story, *The Outsiders.*

Step Eight: Read the repeated story line
Some elementary books will have a line that is repeated that describes the main idea of the story. If not, create one that emphasizes a central theme throughout the story or chapter. Having a repeated story line increases student engagement in the story. Begin reading the line then allow the student(s) to complete the line. **Use a voice output device for students who are nonverbal.**

Step Nine: Turn the page
Turning the page after the teacher has stopped reading helps make the connection between printed text and hearing the story. Indirectly ask the student to turn the page: "What do we need to do to keep our story going?" The request is implied to prevent the student from simply following the teacher's direct command. **For a student with physical limitations try:**
Pipe cleaners or craft sticks glued to the pages to create handles; Pieces of sponge glued to separate the pages; A voice output device programmed to say, "Turn the page".

Step Ten: Comprehension
Comprehension questions can be kept very basic or can provide students with opportunities for higher-level thinking.

Story-based lessons can provide educators with powerful teaching strategies to expand literacy skills for students with intellectual disabilities and hearing loss. It is important to carefully plan story-based lessons so that students can receive the greatest benefit from instruction. Included next are some final tips to consider when planning story-based lessons:

Final tips:

- When reviewing a book to decide which elements to focus on, make sure you have a balance of ideas or experiences that are familiar to the students as well as ideas that are novel and interesting.
- Choose simple stories first, stories that have only a few characters with one main event or problem. Beginning stories should also have simple text.
- If a book seems too complex, for example in *Lemonade for Sale* there are several underlying themes: math, calendar (days of the week), and teamwork, adapt the book so that the focus is only on one theme. Tape together pages that you don't need to read. Simplify pages that are long and detailed.
- The first and possibly the second reading of a book should be considered a "teaching phase." As you read the book, label any unfamiliar words, pic syms or pictures that will later be used for vocabulary or comprehension questions.
- It will be easier for students to process information if it is presented through a variety of modalities.
- When possible, provide an activity to go along with the story that is meaningful. For example, if reading the book *Lemonade for Sale*, make some lemonade with your students. Make sure that everyone has an active role in making the lemonade. If you will be reading the story multiple times take photos of the activity so that you can review. Try to keep a sample such as a cup of lemonade to use for your anticipatory set.
- If necessary, keep the vocabulary simple, focusing on one or two main words.
- Even at the elementary level, many books will have too much text. Reading the books as written may be over stimulating and may deliver too many details at one time. When there is too much text pick out the most important sentences and either cover unneeded sentences or retype the page to include only the sentences you need.
- If working with a small group, do a picture walk before reading.
- Plan literal comprehension questions and stop to ask the questions as soon as the answer is provided in the text. Questions that are inferential can take more of a discussion format.
- Add some variety by asking questions where there is no correct answer such as: Did you like the story? Or: Who was your favorite character?

Lee, A. (2010). Students with significant cognitive disabilities: Story based lessons. Modules Addressing Special Education and Teacher Education (MAST). Greenville, NC: East Carolina University. Available from http://mast.ecu.edu/modules/ssid_sbl/