The Four Blocks Model of Literacy Instruction

A way to improve student literacy skills
The 916 History

• 916 teachers struggled to adapt general education curriculum to meet the unique student needs

• District Curriculum Specialist facilitated conversations with staff on the Four Blocks Model related to Literacy (Cunningham).
  • Staff continued to struggle with how to modify this method to meet their needs.

• A team of five individuals from 916 applied and received the opportunity to attend Literacy Camp in summer of 2013. Literacy Camp is sponsored by national literacy experts, Drs. Karen Erickson and David Koopenhaver.
The 916 History

• That team of five implemented what they learned at camp and collected data
• Quickly realized the impact these methods had on students
• The same team applied for a attended Literacy Camp II in both MN and PA in 2014. Learning more in depth assessments and specifics to nonverbal populations.
• A new team of four teachers from 916 (Karner Blue and South Campus) were accepted and attended Literacy Camp in summer 2015.
Karen Erickson & Dave Koppenhaver

• Experts in literacy and disability from North Carolina
• Dave Koppenhaver was the founder and Karen Erickson is the Director of the Center for Literacy and Disabilities at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (CLDS)
• The two have worked together for more than 20 years conducting research and developing methods and materials focused on literacy assessment and intervention for students with complex communication needs and other disabilities.
• http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds
What Did We Learn At Camp?

• The Four Blocks Model should be implemented daily with students.
  • This looks different based off of the students in your classroom.

• Emergent vs. Conventional Literacy Learners
  • Four Blocks the same, but instruction looks different
Does the student:

Know most of the letters most of the time?
Engage actively during shared reading?
Have a means of communication and interaction?
Understand that writing involves letters and words?

No

Daily Emergent Interventions

Shared Reading
Predictable Chart Writing
Alphabet & Phonological Awareness
Independent Writing with access to full alphabet
Independent Reading

Yes

Daily Conventional Interventions

Guided Reading (Anchor-Read-Apply)
Word Study (Key Words + Making Words)
Writing
Independent Reading
What are the Four Blocks?
Self-Selected Reading & Guided Reading

Self-Selected Reading:

Purpose: Help students develop the skills to select reading materials that they find interesting. Provide opportunities for students to share and respond to what they are reading

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007, p.42)

Guided Reading:

Purpose: Give students experience with a wide variety of text types. Increase student ability to self-select and apply purposes for comprehending

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007, p.64)
Working With Words:

Purpose: Help children learn high-frequency words needed for fluent, successful reading with comprehension. Teach children the skills required to decode and spell words they will use for reading and writing

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007, p.111)

Writing:

Purpose: Help students develop the skills to independently write a variety of texts for real purposes on topics of interest. Provide opportunities for teachers to conference individually with children about the texts they are composing

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007, p.86)
Classroom Observations (2013-2014)

September:
- 1/3 of students did not know letters
- All students were unable to read silently
- All students struggled with comprehension questions, often answering with “I don’t know”
- Students protested group academics, lots of observed aggression (physical and verbal) when directed to literacy sessions

June:
- All but one student knows letters
- Students understand and are able to demonstrate reading silently
- All students are answering comprehension questions with comments related to the text. (May still be out of context of question)
- Student behaviors have minimized, students participate in group academics with little outburst but no physical aggression related to attending literacy sessions
Data (2013-2014)

• From September to June students exposed to this literacy model showed the following academic progress:
  
  • Word Identification: on average each student has increased 2 grade levels
  
  • Listening Comprehension: on average each student has increased 1 grade level
  
  • Silent Reading Comprehension: on average each student has increased 1 grade level
  
• Students received 30 minutes of instruction in each block (45 minutes recommended)
Why This Approach?

• It can be used with ANY curriculum.

• It can be used in all curricular models (Related Services at 916)

• Most importantly it produces positive results for ANY student regardless of their disability category or cognitive level.

• When students are engaged in quality instruction unwanted behaviors can decrease and learning increases.
Common Practices

• Before we begin, it is important to look at some of the common practices that we as Special Educators use when we do literacy with our students.

• Everything that we do should be working towards the goal of students reading and writing independently!
Why is Reading & Writing Important?

• Students need to be able to write so they can express themselves and communicate for a variety of purposes

• If a student is not able to read and write, they will always need an adult with them for assistance.

• Life outcomes – how much richer is your life because you can read and write?
Now, on to the myths!

First, here are three of the big assumptions that can negatively affect our students.
Myth #1: The Big One

“This student can’t learn to read or write.”

• Least Dangerous Assumption

• We all started somewhere

• Maybe we just don’t know how to teach them
Myth #2

“We should be focusing on functional skills.”

• What is more functional than reading and writing in every aspect of the student’s life?

• Many of these functional skills do not actually accomplish what they intend
Myth #3

“This does not apply to my students.”

• Students of all ability levels benefit from Four Blocks instruction.

• Materials can of course be modified and supplemental materials should be used, but the general principles apply to everyone.
Now let’s talk about some of the ways that we as Special Educators have historically taught literacy.
Sight Words/Flash Cards

• Teaching in isolation without context

• When reading, does not help students with decoding skills needed to identify words that are not sight words

• When writing, students lack the skills needed to get their thoughts out

• If students go straight from the alphabet to sight words, they may not even understand what a word is!
Handwriting/Tracing

• Every student needs a pencil, whether it is traditional, a computer, or a form of AAC.

• If a student is not able to write legibly, you can still work on handwriting, but give him a tool that he can use to participate in literacy activities!

• Handwriting and tracing provides no context for what the student is writing
Arabic Example
Linear Approach to Literacy

• The idea that students need to have prerequisite skills before it is worthwhile to do literacy instruction with them

• This is how we end up with students who are still working on their letters or tracing their name when they graduate

• Goes hand in hand with the last two slides, as these prerequisite skills are often the ones performed in isolation
Picture Symbols

• While picture symbols can be useful for communication, they can actually be detrimental for literacy instruction

• In some cases, students can rely on the pictures instead of decoding the word

• In many cases, picture symbols are not helpful at all in identifying words and just provide another layer of confusion...let’s try this exercise.
Can You Read This?
How Well Did You Do?

Hello! I hope this page will give you an idea of how we are using computer technology with our son.
And finally, a word about materials

• It is crucial that every student has access to a wide range of books in the classroom, no matter what their reading level.

• Many creative ways to provide books to students who may not be as gentle with books as we would like:
  - Laminated books
  - Tar Heel Reader
  - Use household materials (cereal boxes)
Guided Reading
Guided Reading

Purpose:
• Provide experience in a wide variety of text types
• Help students develop the skills necessary for the mechanics of reading (left to right top to bottom)
• Apply purposes for comprehension
  • What good is reading if you cannot understand what you are reading

Erickson and Koppenhaver, pg. 64, 2007.
Guided Reading

• Made for conventional students

• Made to maximize thinking
Guided Reading

• Anchor-Read-Apply (ARA)
• Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DR-TA)
• Know, Want to know, Learned (KWL)
• Parallel Strategy for Expository Text
Anchor Read Apply (before-during-after)

• Anchor (before)
  • Build or activate background knowledge or personal connection making
  • Set a clear purpose for reading/listening

• Read (during)
  • Reading/listening for bulk of time

• Apply (after)
  • Complete a task directly related to purpose
  • Follow up and feed back

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension
Example of ARA

Story: The Big Blue Ox

**A:** Discuss ways you help out at home

**R:** Read to list how the Ox helps out Mom and Pop

**A:** List ideas on board
Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA)  
(Stauffer)

• Students look at title or pictures and PREDICT story
• Students READ to a predetermined stopping place
• Students PROVE the accuracy of their predictions and modify or make new predictions

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension
Example of DR-TA

Story: A Big Fish for Max

• Tell the students the title of the book without showing them the cover or pages.

• Have students predict what the book is about. Write predictions on board. Read to see if predictions were true

• Stop partially through text to check predictions
KWL

• Know

• Want to Know

• Learned
Example of KWL

Story: How Do You Raise a Raisin?

• Make a KWL chart (know, want to know, learned) Fill out the K with their ideas & facts about raisins & fill out the W with what they want to know (give examples if needed)
• Read to fill out the L portion of the chart
• Fill out the L portion of the KWL chart with things you learned about raisins
KWL Raisins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know</th>
<th>Want to Know</th>
<th>Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parallel Strategy for Expository Text

Yes or No? Before

• The alpaca resembles a small llama.
• The alpaca lives in the islands of Hawaii.
• Alpacas were bred as pack animals.
• Alpaca fur is used to make mohair.
The alpaca is a domesticated animal from South America. It resembles a small llama in appearance. Alpacas are kept in herds that graze on the level heights of the Andes of southern Peru, northern Bolivia, Ecuador, and northern Chile at an altitude of 11,500 to 16,000 ft above sea level. Alpacas were bred to specifically for their fleece. Alpaca fleece is used for making knitted and woven items, similar to wool. The fleece comes in more than 52 natural colors as classified in Peru. In the textile industry, "alpaca" primarily refers to the hair of Peruvian alpacas, but more broadly it refers to a style of fabric originally made from alpaca hair but now often made from similar fibers, such as mohair.
Parallel Strategy for Expository Text

Yes or No? Before

• The alpaca resembles a small llama.
• The alpaca lives in the islands of Hawaii.
• Alpacas were bred as pack animals.
• Alpaca fur is used to make mohair.
Shared Reading
Purpose:

- Provide experience in a wide variety of text types
- Help students develop the skills necessary for the mechanics of reading (left to right top to bottom)
- Apply purposes for engagement
- How can you understand what you are reading if you are not engaged in the text

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Shared Reading

• Made for Emergent Students

• Made to be interactive and maximize interactions
Shared Reading

The reader ...  
• Encourages communication  
• Follows student’s interests  
• Attributes meaning to all attempts  
• Makes connections between book & student’s experiences  
• Thinks aloud to model thought processes  
• Models using student’s communication symbols  

The student...  
• Leads the activity!

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Follow the C-A-R

An approach to structuring shared reading interactions

• Lead with a COMMENT.

STOP and wait 5-30 seconds.

• ASK a question.

STOP and wait 5-30 seconds.

• RESPOND by adding more.

Language is the Key, Washingtonlearningsystems.org
Put the CROWD in the CAR

Corinne Gandy Watson, 2008
CROWD

• Completion
• Recall
• Open-Ended
• Wh- Questions
• Distancing

Rotate through them as it makes sense!
Completion

• Leave a blank at the end of a sentence and child fills it in.
• These are typically used in books with rhyme or books with repetitive phases.
• Example, "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a white dog looking at ____," letting the child fill in the blank with the word me.
• Completion questions help students begin to understand the structure of language in books.

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Recall

• Questions about what happened in a portion of the book that has just been read.
• Example, “Tell me what the little truck did.”

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Open-Ended

• Questions that do not have specifically right/wrong answers.
• Usually focus on the pictures in books.
• Example, "Tell me what's happening in this picture."

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Wh- Questions

• Questions that begin with what, where, when, why, and how.
• Typically focus on the pictures in books.
• Example, ”What does the man have?”

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Distancing

• Questions that relate what is in the book to experiences outside the book.
• Form a bridge between books and the real world.
• Example, "You saw animals at the farm. What animal did you see at the farm?"

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.
Strive for Five

• Frequent, extended conversations with adults promote better language and literacy outcomes.

• Keep child engaged in conversation – do not let it end after the child has contributed just one or two turns.

• Conversation between an adult and a child should go back-and-forth at least five times.
Non Verbal Shared reading

• Use of open ended, “core” vocabulary allow adults to respond to student multiple times throughout the activity.
• Core vocabulary is flexible and can be used with different books over time.
• Consistent symbol set fosters motor/visual memory
• Consider long term utility. Can these words be used in other activities, settings, etc.?

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Core Vocabulary for Students Who Use AAC.
Sample Core Layout
Shared Reading

• Strategy that can be used with ALL students
• It’s all about the communication and engagement
• Supports emergent literacy concepts
• Utilize core words to maximize interaction
• Follow the CAR

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension
Working With Words
Purpose of Working with Words Block

• Students practice multilevel phonetic activities that are designed for children of all ability levels.
• Help children learn high-frequency words needed for fluent, successful reading with comprehension
• Teach children the skills required to decode and spell words they will use for reading and writing
• Phonics
• Phonemic Awareness/ Alphabet

Erickson and Koppenhaver, pg. 111 (2007)
Specific Students Target Different Things

• Conventional:
  • Word identification
  • Automaticity
  • Phonics

• Emergent:
  • Alphabet
  • Phonemic Awareness
Different Activities

• Word Wall
• Guess the covered word
• Guess the mystery word
• Word sorts
• Making words (Systematic Sequential Phonics, Sonday)
• Phonemic Awareness
• Alphabet games
Word Wall

• 10-15 minutes per day
• Large display
• 5 words a week for 6 weeks then 3 weeks review
• Colors behind words in a randomized way, cut around tall/short letters
• Smallest is 2 inch letters
• 37 common rhymes, Dolch words, high interest words
• Search Word wall chants in Google

Erickson and Koppenhaver, pp. 112-117 (2007)
Guess The Covered Word

Example
Guess The Mystery Word

• Pin one sheet of blank paper up on the word wall. Secretly pick one word from the word wall and draw blanks on the paper with the marker for every letter in the mystery word. Have students raise their hands to guess what word it could be. Give hints as necessary.

• (Hang Man)
Word Sorts

• Students sort words based on sounds (T-chart can be used)

• Example
Making Words

• Systematic Sequential Phonics
  • Show Electronic lessons 1-80
  • Text
• Sunday
Phonemic Awareness

- Isolation: What is the first sound in cat?
- Identity: What sound is the same in bag, butter and ball?
- Categorization: Which word doesn’t belong? Fun, four, sit
- Blending: What word is /t/ /a/ /n/ write on board
- Segmentation: How many sounds in fast? /f/ /a/ /s/ /t/ 4 write on board
- Deletion: What is blast without the /b/?
- Addition: What word do you have if you add /c/ to the word at?
- Substitution: The word id dog. Change the /d/ to /l/. What is the new word?
Alphabet Games

• Singing a variety of alphabet songs
• Draw a letter from a box to read a corresponding word from word wall
• Draw letters/words in a variety of materials: rice, sand, salt, dirt, gel, etc.
• I spy letters
• Show videos
Classroom Examples

• Most ideas came from the Four Blocks Texts
Writing
Writing Block Purpose

• See writing as a way to tell about things
• Learn to read through writing
• Beyond copying, beyond tracing that is fine motor writing. Our goal is writing for literacy.
• Help students develop the skills to independently write a variety of texts for real purposes on topics of interest
• Provide opportunities for teachers to conference individually with children about the texts they are composing

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007, p.86)
What Is Not Writing?

• Copying
• Tracing
• Handwriting exercises
• Fill-in-the-blank
• Writing with symbols
• Grammar worksheets
Specific Students Target Different Things

Conventional: Goal: Build skills to communicate experiences, thoughts, feelings, and understandings for diverse audiences and purposes.

- Prewriting
- Draft
- Revise
- Edit
- Publish

Emergent: Goal: Build early understanding of the functions of print

- Think
- Draw (pick picture if can not draw)
- Write
- Put your name on paper
- Read what you wrote to your teacher who date stamps and records on back
More On Emergent Writing

What is it?

• The marks, scribbles, lines, and randomly selected letters of beginning writers

During emergent writing students are learning:

• How to use a pencil
• To experiment and construct understandings
• That writing is communication
• To represent their ideas

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Emergent Writing.
Writing Activities

• Predictable Chart Writing
• Give Me 5
• Lists
• Independent Writing
• Writing Process Instruction
• Alternative Pencils
• Finding meaning
Predictable Chart Writing

Goal: Build early understandings of the concept of word and word identification.

A group writing activity, five step process, results in a book for the class library, easily differentiated to meet a variety of student needs

• 1: Write chart 2: Reread & work with chart 3: Work with cutup sentence strips 4: Be the sentence 5: Make the book

• See link: http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/files/how-to-handouts/PredChartWriting.pdf
PCW Example Starters

• My name is _____.
• I see a ______.
• A ___ lives in the ocean.
• I am ___ years old.
• I like to eat ______.
Give Me 5 Camping

Student 1
-

Student 2
-

Student 3
-

Student 4
-
Lists

Think of all the things people make lists of....

This is a very functional academic skill
Independent Writing

• Think
• Draw (pick picture if can not draw)
• Write
• Put your name on paper
• Read what you wrote to your teacher who date stamps and records on back

Student is dictating the writing, teacher can influence with prewriting activities.
Not prompting with ideas, prompting with tell me more....
Writing Process

• Prewriting
• Draft
• Revise
• Edit
• Publish

Many activities related to each area can be found:

Finding Meaning
Personal Connections are the Key

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Marty, a student in my special education classroom who is a big fan of John Cena and WWE as a whole. At the beginning of the school year, Marty did not have much for literacy skills nor the intrinsic motivation to work on academic tasks. Through his interest and motivation of John Cena, Marty has made significant progress in the area of literacy. He enjoys self-selected reading time where everyday he reads the WWE Magazine I purchase for him monthly. He has all of the posters from the magazine hung up in the classroom. Everyday he works hard for a WWE trading card to bring home.

Recently during our writing lessons Marty has wanted to write to John Cena. He spent a lot of time thinking about what to say and forming his handwritten letters. The letter attached is a drawn picture of a wrestling match with the caption “What is your favorite match?” This is the finest work the student has ever produced; he was very proud.

A response of any sort would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and the difference you have made in this child’s life.

Sincerely,

Kayna Plaisted
Special Education Teacher
Northeast Metro 916
Alternative Pencils

• To get access to an alternate pencil, students DO NOT need to demonstrate:
  • the physical ability to use the alternative pencil
  • Knowledge of the letters of the alphabet

• Pick a pencil that is EASIEST for student to physically use.
  • With limited, unreliable movements, pick one that has most potential to develop into a writing tool

• Students learn about pencils and letters by writing.
• The pencil MUST provide access to the full alphabet.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnveMycB-YQ

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Emergent Writing.
Simple Keyboards Can Provide An Alternative
Alternate Pencils can be More Complex

Writing With Alternative Pencils CD, Available from the Center for Literacy & Disability Studies University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC
More Alternative Pencils
Developmental Spelling Stages

• Print has meaning
  • Graphic elements can represent ideas
  • Scribble, numbers, letter-like strings, letters
• Random Letters
  • Only letters are used by no awareness of sound-symbol relationships
• Semi-phonemic
  • Attempt to represent sounds in words
  • Only use 1 or 2 letters/sounds in a word
• Phonetic (letter-name spelling)
  • Learning letter/sound correspondences
• Transitional
  • Rules based, not always conventional
  • Words look like real words

Erickson and Koppenhaver, DST (2014).
Emergent Writing or Alternative Pencil Stages

• REP-IO: Repeats Letters In Order
  • Aaaaaaaaaabbbbbbbbbccccccdddd or qqqqqqqwwwwwwwwwreeeeerrrrrr

• REP-OO: Repeats Letters Out of Order
  • Jjjjjjortttttttghhhhhhhhemae

• Patterns: Selects Letters in Alternating Patterns
  • hrhrhrhrhrhwwwwlwlwlwlwlwlqrrttuttututu

• Spaces: Students Selects Space Regularly
  • L e eeeeee qu qu qu eeeeee fjjfjf j f j

• WG: Word Like Groupings
  • Aht mos rrhu jfjfjfjfj Akaka

• PVR: Phonemic & Visual Representations
  • Lpft mks ld nos

• Words: Whole words but may have spellings errors

Erickson and Koppenhaver, Emergent Writing.
This book makes me feel mad because I don't like nothin.
Independent/Self-Selected Reading
Self-Selected Reading Purpose

• Increase the odds that students choose to read once they are able.
• Increase competence in skimming, scanning, sampling, selecting appropriate and interesting books.
• Increase competence in sharing interest and excitement about reading.
• Increase fluency in application of skills learned in guided reading and words blocks.
• Standards

Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver, D. *Self-Directed Reading Notes.*
Self-Selected Reading Activities

• Read aloud
• Self-Selected choice
  • Needs access to several easy books around comprehension levels
• Silent reading
• Conferencing around story
• Sharing opportunities
• Tarheel reader

Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver, D. Self-Directed Reading Notes.
Teacher Read-Aloud

• Teachers read to students every day regardless of students’ age or reading ability.
• Select books that are at or near the students’ listening comprehension levels.
• Attract students to new authors and new books by reading only the beginning of a book and leaving them hanging.

Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver, D. *Self-Directed Reading Notes.*
Read-Aloud

• Do’s
  • Read aloud daily from a variety of materials.
  • Teach students how to listen to stories.
  • Set purposes for listening.
  • Link the text to the students’ experiences.
  • Make the book available after the read-aloud.

• Don’ts
  • Discourage questions and comments.
  • Read too fast.
  • Don’t insist on consensus or correct interpretation.

Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver, D. *Self-Directed Reading Notes*. 
Self-Selected Reading

• Needs access to several easy books around comprehension levels
• Can use power point and other multimedia books
• Tarheelreader.org
• Accessible books
  • Books face out
  • Easier to reach
  • More attractive
Silent Reading

• Use of inner voice
  • Non verbal look for signs of vocalization while reading, following along with eyes

• Often students are taught to read aloud but do not receive enough opportunities to read silently
Conferencing Around Story and Sharing

• Opportunities to the students to share what they are interested in with others

• Opportunities for teacher to monitor how much is read and what levels the student feels comfortable with
Tar Heel Reader

• Create and print stories of interest to the students
• Create easier forms of higher level text for secondary students
• Download read aloud stories into iBooks for students to use during self-selected reading
• Play stories on computer during self-selected reading
References


Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver. D. Self-Directed Reading Notes [PDF Document]. Taken from 8th Camp Courage Literacy Camp Wiki at: http://mnliteracy.pbworks.com/w/page/54513241/8th%20Cam%20Courage%20Literacy%20Camp


References


Erickson, K. and Koppenhaver, D., Emergent Writing [PDF Document].


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