

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

LITERACY FACT SHEET Literacy for Learners with Visual Impairment

Role of the Occupational Therapist

Completed by a CDE Workgroup on Literacy for Learners with Visual Impairments

“Literacy is the ability to read and write, to access information, and to communicate thoughts and ideas to others.” (p. 171)

Holbrook, C. (1996). *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 90(3), 171-172.



Literacy is important for all learners. For the individual with visual impairment, especially those students with additional disabilities, it is critical that literacy be addressed through a team approach. Assessment information from key developmental domains and the learner’s academic performance is necessary to build a total picture of literacy needs.

This Fact Sheet addresses the primary areas specifically related to physical, sensory, and conceptual development. These areas might be best addressed by the learner’s occupational therapist, with the support of a teacher certified in the area of visual impairment. Questions that will guide the assessment process may include:

Motor and Physical Health Status

- What are the learner’s current medications and their potential secondary effects on alertness, movement, balance, and physical stamina?
- Does the learner have any health problems that may interfere with attention, learning and communication?

Learning Style: Response and Motivation Related to Sensory Information

- Is there a discernible learning style or pattern?
- What are the sensory motivators? What sensory activities calm or alert the learner?
- What types of sensory stimulus assist or distract the learner’s attention span upon attending, learning, and movement tasks? What is the motivation for movement? How and to what does the learner respond?
- What is the level of the learner’s ability to discriminate tactile input? Does the child demonstrate any hypersensitivity to tactile or other stimuli?
- What are the issues affecting the learner’s literacy such as physical stamina, eye-hand coordination, tactual discrimination, upper extremity strength, and positioning?

Fine Motor and Upper Extremity

- Describe the learner's postural tone and whether it compromises the ability to use literacy modes?
- Does the learner have full range of motion of the upper extremity?
- Does the learner have an age-appropriate grasp for fine motor activities? Does the child have age-appropriate finger isolation and strength?
- How well does the learner use his or her hands for exploration, manipulation, general eye-hand coordination tasks, accessing a tape recorder, using a keyboard, using assistive technology, writing with a pencil and/or using a braillewriter?
- Does the learner need any adaptive tools for literacy-specific, fine motor tasks?

Positioning

- Describe if the learner needs special attention to his or her positioning.
- What equipment, if any, is needed to assist with proper positioning?

Oral Motor

- Are the learner's oral motor skills at an age-appropriate level?
- Does the learner seek out or avoid oral stimulation?
- What kinds of items do the learner mouth (if mouthing is still evident)?
- What are preferences for taste and textures of food and drink?

Visual Motor

- What are the results, as appropriate for the learner, on a nonmotor visual-perception test?
- Are the learner's visual-motor and/or fine motor skills at an age-appropriate level?
- Is the learner's handwriting legible to other people and to him or herself?

Special Programming Concerning Sensory and Motor Skills

- Is the learner currently receiving occupational therapy in school and/or within the private sector?

Data Collection / Evidence of Student Change

- Is there evidence of data collection that guides the team's decisions about the learner's literacy program? Is there a body of evidence that informs the student's ongoing instruction in literacy activities?



For more information about Literacy Modality Plans for students with visual impairments, please contact your local teacher of students with visual impairments or Tanni Anthony, State Consultant on Visual Impairment, Colorado Department of Education, 201 East Colfax, Denver, Colorado 80203, phone - (303) 866-6681 or email: Anthony_t@cde.state.co.us. Fact Sheet Updated: 10/04