Introduction

As a consultant, I visited a middle school to do an observation on a student with Down syndrome. In his American history class, he was writing on a paper while he industriously turned the pages of the textbook. I observed to the teacher that he seemed to be doing the work for the class.

"Oh, no! He doesn't read at all," she said. "He wants to be like the rest of the students so he pretends to read and do work."

I then asked if he was getting any reading instruction.

"Yes, I work with him alone on survival words like *poison* and *emergency* on flashcards."

"How does he do with the flashcards?" I asked.

"Well, he tries to memorize them, but he doesn't seem to remember all of them from one lesson to another. However, at least he tries. I have another student here who won't even try. He copies the words from the book, but he won't work with me on the survival words—and he gets angry if I push."

I couldn't help but think that the survival words didn't have much meaning for this teacher's two students. Words on signs are often shown with pictures for non-English speakers anyway. Also, if the first student could learn *emergency* as a sight word, he could probably learn the shorter sight words that are a part of beginning reading instruction.

The student with Down syndrome that I observed had developed habits to disguise his lack of literacy. Some students develop even more sophisticated ways of disguising their reading disabilities. In contrast, the other nonreading student in the class was frustrated and discouraged with his lack of progress and had become a behavior problem. Have you known students like this?

I consider basic reading an important survival skill, and it deserves much teaching time and energy—even for the teachers and parents of older students. The approach described in *Try Reading Again* is designed for these older students who have not been able to learn to read through regular classroom instruction.

Who should use *Try Reading Again*?

- Intermediate and secondary teachers
- Parents
- Reading tutors
- Volunteers who work with individual students in reading

Which students will profit from learning with *Try Reading Again*?

- Students of any age who have not been successful with beginning reading or have fewer than 100 sight words
- Visual learners, especially those with Down syndrome and autism
- Students who are older (third through twelfth grades) and want age-appropriate materials
- Students who show little interest in beginning reading
- English as a Second Language (ESL) beginning learners
- Students with mild learning disabilities (students with severe learning disabilities or severe dyslexia will probably need a more intensive phonics program such as the Wilson program or others based on the Orton-Gillingham program)
- Any student being taught by parent, tutor, or teacher who wishes to use one book that has details on language experience stories, phonemic awareness/phonics, and structured beginning readings

Try Reading Again: The Triangle Reading Approach

This book recommends a "triangle" approach to teaching reading to struggling beginners. That is, three strategies are used simultaneously in order to engage the student in learning, ensure that he is successful from the start, and help him build basic skills that will ensure his continuing success. The three components of the program can be represented like this:

Phonics/phonemic awareness

Fluent reading of structured stories by others

Language experience stories (Base)
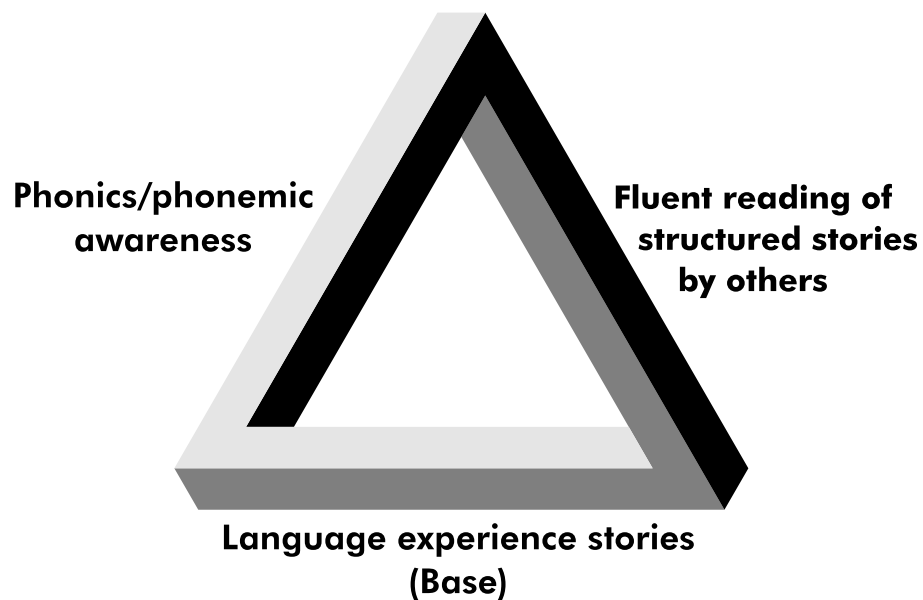
1. Language Experience Stories

Students who have not been successful with reading in the general classroom have a major barrier to further learning. Many times they are frustrated and would rather not try than risk failing again. **Motivation** must be addressed before other strategies can be successful. Researchers have found that students who read stories about their own experiences using their own vocabulary words are much more motivated to read (Pierson & Glaeser, 2003; Ashton-Warner, 1963, 1986). Creating stories about the student's own experiences in the student's own vocabulary is the base of the Triangle Approach.

2. Phonemic Awareness/Phonics

The second part of the Triangle Approach is **phonemic awareness and phonics**. Some struggling older students have a reading vocabulary of more than 100 words, but they have difficulty figuring out new words because they do not have phonic patterns internalized. Most older beginning students come to instruction knowing the sounds of some of the consonants but need to learn the rest of the consonants, blends, digraphs, short and long vowel sounds, and simple prefixes and suffixes. Good readers usually intuit these concepts, but students with difficulties need to be specifically taught phonics and be shown how to use them when decoding.

Try Reading Again uses several strategies to help older beginners master phonics. First, age-appropriate phonics exercises are provided for the student. A simple-to-make game is also given for each major topic. The book also recommends the use of specific activities available on the free educational website *Starfall.* Most students who have Internet access will enjoy and benefit from the computer graphics and stories on *Starfall.* Phonics can be boring, so visiting the website really helps engagement and motivation. *Starfall* also has stories that illustrate the phonics principles that are being taught.

3. Structured Stories

Ultimately, students will need to read stories and content written by other authors. Older students are "turned off" by reading materials that are aimed at young children. Books such as *The Poky Little Puppy* (Lowery & Tennegren, 1942, 2001) and others with talking animals and preschool-type experiences can be embarrassing for intermediate or secondary level students to read and carry with their school books. **Try Reading Again** therefore includes structured stories with age-appropriate content and pictures. These stories are structured so that they gradually introduce sight words such as *it* and *was* that must be automatically read (and can't be guessed from pictures such as *cat* and *book).* The Triangle Approach emphasizes both sight and content words in the structured stories. These **age-appropriate stories** teach **vocabulary** necessary for older students. The most commonly encountered sight words are taught in a sequenced order.

Each level of **Try Reading Again** has a language experiences section, a phonemic awareness-phonics section, and a section with age-appropriate, structured selections for new reading. The book has three levels of difficulty in each of the three basic areas—ending at a second- to third-grade reading level. If a student can finish the last level, he or she should be able to read some of the High Interest-Low Vocabulary books that are presently available from many publishers. Many other reading programs can be used at this

point—for example, sight-based *Reading Milestones (1985, 2001),* or phonics-based *Reading Mastery (Englemann & Bruner, 1995)* or *Multiple Syllable Rewards* (Archer, Gleason, & Vacheon, 2006), etc.

Why Should You Use This Book?

- It combines language experience stories, phonemic awareness/phonics, and sequenced vocabulary stories.
- Clear procedures are listed for teaching reading.
- The stories and pictures are age appropriate for older students.
- The scope and sequence of reading instruction is contained in one book, rather than in separate phonics and reading books.
- The book has games and fun rhymes for every major topic in phonemic awareness and phonics.
- It introduces adult-type "nursery" rhymes to teach rhyming in phonemic awareness.
- It uses the website Starfall for computer-based activities, when appropriate.
- The book has mini-worksheets for student/teaching learning and independent worksheets for the student.
- Using examples, it teaches professionals and nonprofessionals how to write language experience stories, individualized to the student.
- It has objectives and evaluations for each topic in phonemic awareness/phonics. The different levels of difficulty can be used with Response to Intervention (RTI) Tiers II and III (secondary, more time-on-task intervention, and more intensive intervention). The evaluations at the end of each topic can be used for curriculum-based measurements that are an important part of RTI.
- And finally, you can use the instructional strategies and materials to make a meaningful difference in the life of someone who has been struggling to learn to read, as I've learned from personal experience.

The boy with Down syndrome in the above example was transferred to another school, where he finally did learn to read. I had another student who graduated from high school without being able to read. He didn't want to go to an adult education reading class. Instead, I tutored him weekly for a year (with the added incentive of feeding him lunch), using all three components of the Triangle Approach. He learned about 200 words and later felt comfortable finishing up with an adult education class.

His roommates were used to reading for him. I was there one day when they brought in a flyer for a bowling event. They started to read the flyer out loud, and he said, "Shut up, you guys. I can read it myself." He then proceeded to read the whole flyer—with pride.

Questions and Answers

Teaching Concerns

There are so many different ways to teach individuals to read. How do I know that the Triangle method described in this book is the best to teach my student?

There are a variety of programs for teaching reading. Most students can learn to read from any of the major reading programs. The older students targeted by the Triangle Approach have not been able to learn to read via the traditional methods used in their classrooms or tutoring. The approaches used have advantages for the slower learner. This approach is not totally whole language, phonemic awareness, or phonics (the most common approaches).

Language experience stories, in which students read about their own experiences as told in their words, are very helpful in giving struggling readers initial feelings of success. Once they have mastered reading their own words, they often become quite proficient in reading others' words by sight. However, there may be limits to the number of sight words they are able to memorize. Eventually, the students need to be able decode unfamiliar words by using the phonetic code. The problem is that some of the phonic programs available take a good deal of teaching time, use activities that are geared to younger children, or are dull. The Triangle Approach uses age appropriate, fun activities that can be taught in a school year.

Eventually, students must be able read selections written by various other authors. The Triangle approach supplies reading material that is appropriate for older students, rather than students in early childhood. Other resources are outlined that students can use once they reach first and second grade reading levels.

My student can read complex language experience stories, but he has a lot of trouble with beginning phonics.

It is possible that a student can master many sight words through learning to read words that are part of his own vocabulary and experience (Browder et al., 2006). Phonics may be more difficult for the student because he sees the whole word and not its different parts. It is very possible that a student will not be on the same level in phonics as in language experience stories or in reading new stories.

Some Suggestions: You may not need to work on phonics as often as you do the language experience stories. Emphasize the fun parts of the phonics exercises and the material from the computer program Starfall. You may need to try beginning phonemic awareness exercises to see if the student needs review on initial consonants or on hearing rhyming words. Use some activities with visual or tactile (touching) emphasis such as magnetic letters or pictures or writing letters (if the student does not have fine motor problems). Be positive and try to make the activities as much fun as possible.

My student seems to do better when other students are learning with him.

Some students do better when competing with another student or doing poems and songs with another person. Parents, you can use siblings to help motivate your child to learn, as long as this does not discourage his. Do not use large groups because each student

needs to be actively involved in the learning, and the adult needs to quickly correct mistakes or clear up misunderstandings about concepts.

My student thinks that the camp song rhymes are silly and doesn't want to learn them.

Some students do not want to sing if other people can hear them. For self-conscious students, chanting the words of songs will produce the same effect—namely, helping them to master a rule or concept. Sometimes the teacher is reluctant to sing or chant the rhymes and the student senses this. You have to show enthusiasm to get your students to enjoy the rhymes. You can use other poems or camp songs that may be more appropriate for your learners. Some students have difficulty hearing the endings of words, which makes rhyming hard. If so, you can go ahead in the Phonics sections and return to the rhymes only when you can tell that the student is hearing the ends of words.

I am not sure whether to try the Starfall program with my older student.

Find out whether the student plays video games or watches cartoons on TV or at the movies. If he or she is into video games or cartoons, he or she will probably like the Starfall program. You can preview the levels and see if there are obvious "babyish" pictures or stories in them. Then you can kid about the "babyish" things before the student sees them and still use the Starfall program. I have found that many older students adapt to the Starfall program because it is graphic and on the computer.

How much should I modify what the student says in making the language experience stories?

You need to use as many of the student's words as possible, including slang or words that are not so socially acceptable. However, be aware that students often speak in run-on sentences that are not ideal for learning reading. Repeat the words of the run-on sentence in a simple sentence, saying "Do you mean . . . .?"

You may have to prompt the student with questions to finish the whole story. A prompt such as "What did you do after you got home?" may help the student learn how to tell a story. The story should not be very long, depending on the student's attention span. It is better to write two stories about the same event than to write an extremely long story. If you can prompt a little humor in the story, it will make the story more interesting. For example, one of my students made the comment, "Of course, I am perfect." It was easy to prompt him to say, "Of course, I am perfect" after each small event, and he laughed every time he read it.

Doesn't the student get bored reading the same language experience story or other stories over and over?

Repetition is very important in the Triangle Approach. You should tell the students that you are not just reading to get the content of the story (to find out what happens). When **learning** to read, students need to read stories over and over so that they "over learn" the words and can read the story fluently. When you read science and social studies textbooks, you can read to understand what is said, but in **learning** reading you have to almost memorize the story in order to read it fluently. Many children learn to read by memorizing favorite stories due to frequent readings. The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) found that repeated oral reading with feedback resulted in significant reading improvement.

What if this book does not have enough stories and exercises to teach my student the various principles of reading?

Some Suggestions: Look at the resource section in this book for other materials on the needed principle or reading level. Most books available on lower reading levels begin at the second or third grade level. Even library books may introduce words too quickly for the beginning reader. Easier reading materials, however, are listed in the resource section.

If your student has a compelling interest, use that to make stories. Get some pictures of the specific interest (e.g., trains) and write a story with trains as the main characters. You will know how to write stories that are appropriate for the student because of your experience writing the student's language experience stories. In this case, however, you will use *your* words to teach the principle or provide more practice reading at the grade level the student needs to work on.

For example:

Objective: to give practice in forming plural and -ing endings.

Nathan and his father were **coming** home from a ball game. They were **looking** for a train station. There ahead of them was the Metro train station. Nathan saw three trains **coming** into the station. Two trains were **pulling** coal cars**.** People were **riding** in a passenger train. Nathan and his father ran to the passenger train. It was good to be **riding** instead of **walking**.

Another strategy is to find teenage magazines and rewrite the content so it is suitable for your student. Use Post-It notes with the simplified content pasted over the regular text.

For example, you could paste the following under a picture of the actor John Stamos:

John Stamos was on the TV show *Full House* for eight years.

Now he plays a doctor on the TV show *ER*, a show about hospitals.

You may also have the student read popular song lyrics. (Preview them first.) These often have rhymes and are usually very interesting to older students. Songs may use more of the right brain by adding imagery, enhancing the student's learning.

Finally, you may want to look into buying some books from a commercially available high/low reading series. You can usually find some sample stories on the websites for these reading series. You can also find a few programs such as A to Z Reading that have reading material available for a fee. See the resource section of this book.

What about students with disabilities that make speech difficult or impossible?

First, you should recognize that understanding sign language is a form of reading. So, if you have a student who uses signs, have him sign the words on the page.

If the student has little speech and does not sign, he can indicate that he understands the meaning of a word by pointing. Have the student point to a named word before turning the page (or having the page turned for him). Another way to check that he can read

the words is to deliberately read one word in a sentence wrong and ask him to point to it. To help a student with fine motor problems turn the page, put your finger in the next page or put in a page fluffer (a piece of sponge that separates the pages so the student can turn them more easily).

For a student with almost no speech, an adult can program a switch to say a phrase that is used frequently in the story, and the student can push the switch at the appropriate time. The student should be looking at the words in the story so he knows when to push the switch. You may also be able to get recorder apps for your smart phone or tablet computer and record the phrase for the student that way.

Computers or augmentative communication devices can help many students with physical disabilities. The printing can be made larger, the device can highlight or pronounce the word, keys can be made more accessible, and symbols or pictures can be added to help the student learn.

Smart phones and tablet computers (such as iPads) will probably be sources of learning games and reading programs that may have application for readers with physical disabilities. See the resource section for suggestions of possible apps.

Educational Concerns

How does the Triangle Approach address the five major areas in learning to read as described by the National Reading Panel?
(National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000)?

The Triangle approach addresses the five areas:

1. **Phonemic Awareness** – identifying letter sounds, hearing initial consonants, rhyming words
2. **Alphabetic Principle** (phonics) – letter knowledge, consonants, short vowels, long vowels, blends, word endings, r-controlled vowels, multisyllabic words
3. **Vocabulary** – learning to read the student's own words and sequenced learning of other words. Individual words are written on cards, and the student names the words as he picks up the cards. Any cards the student does not name correctly are located in the actual language story and correctly read.
4. **Fluency**—repeated oral readings of language experience stories and other structured stories.
5. **Comprehension** – the student understands his own stories, is asked questions following other authors' stories, and develops good phonics understanding so attention can be given to meaning of content.

My principal says that we have to have research-based programs to teach reading. Is the Triangle Approach used in Try Reading Again researched?

The entire Triangle Approach has not been tested with a large number of students and control groups. However, the approaches used in the Triangle Approach have been researched separately.

The language experience approach has been used extensively in schools (Hall, 1978; Heffner, 2004). Many research studies were done comparing the reading of students taught by basal reading series versus the language experience approach (Hall, 1978). Most of the studies showed that the children being taught with the language experience ap-

proach were reading as well as (or better) than the children taught with the basal series (Hildreth, 1995, Kenrick, 1966; Stauffer, Vilscek, Morgan, & Cleland, 1966, and others, as cited in Hall, 1978). The language experience approach has also been successfully used using digital photography and computers with young children (Labbo, Eakle, & Montero, 2002), at the secondary level, and for students learning English as a second language.

The National Reading Panel, in a survey of over 100,000 research studies on reading, concluded that "effective reading instruction includes teaching children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics)" (National Institute of Health, 2000). Reid Lyons and the other members of the Reading Panel concluded that: "Disabled readers must be presented highly structured, explicit and intensive instruction in phonics" (L. Sherman, 2000).

However, Lyons also said, "No matter how bright the child or how interesting the reading material, a child will not learn to read unless he or she understands how print is translated into sound. Likewise, no matter how much phonological awareness and phonics knowledge a youngster has, the child will not want to engage in reading and writing unless it is meaningful and interesting and taught in an exciting and vibrant fashion" (L. Sherman, 2000).

The Triangle Approach includes a phonemic awareness/phonics section with games, poems, and exercises. In addition, the Triangle Approach has a structured story section that includes sequenced vocabulary and age-appropriate content that is interesting and meaningful.

Students who have not learned to read after several years of instruction in the general classroom need to have more intensive instruction and perhaps a different approach. The Triangle Approach covers decoding skills, interest-based language experience stories, and structured, sequenced vocabulary stories; so possibly one of those approaches would apply to your older student.

My school is using Response to Intervention (RTI) for reading instruction. How does the Triangle Approach fit into RTI?

The major purpose for RTI is to catch students who are falling behind in reading before they have experienced real failure with its accompanying discouragement and frustration. Giving more intervention earlier and taking frequent data should help most students show improvement in reading skills. Most students who need RTI will get general reading classroom instruction (level one). Those who fall behind get more intense instruction in level two. Only students who do not respond to level two instructions get specialized, more intense reading intervention.

The Triangle Approach is intended to help students who have not learned in regular classroom instruction. For example, the student's responses to level two intervention may indicate that he needs phonics training. The Triangle Approach has phonics training designed for the older student that can be used. However, much of the material in the Triangle Approach will be most useful for students at level three. The primary users will be those who can work with one to three students, including teachers, parents, tutors, and volunteers. Small assessments are given regularly so that the data can be used to gauge the student's response to intervention.

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