Sensory Activities: Experiences to Improve Communication and Literacy for Children with Visual and Multiple Disabilities

Faye Gonzalez, TVI & COMS
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My Dilemma:

With my students who have Visual & Multiple Disabilities (V&MD):

- Sensory activities are important
- Communication is important
- Working on them separately resulted in limited growth
- What should literacy look like?
- How could I combine things to make learning more effective?
Infusing Sensory Experiences with Communication/Literacy

- Why is pairing sensory and communication/literacy so important?
- What does communication & literacy look like?
- How do we infuse communication & literacy into sensory experiences?
- How can we effectively use our materials to provide a series of experiences?
- How do we modify activities for students with varied skill levels?
- How can we make it easier for staff to implement these activities?
Providing Sensory Experiences for students with V&MD

- Are critical!
- Incidental sensory exposure is limited due to:
  - VI limits seeing models & items to explore
  - Motor issues limit independent experiences
- Experiences with actual objects are the basis for learning about the world for all children
Developing Communication Skills

• Also critical
• Students with V&MD usually have limited communication skills
• Functional communication = telling others
  • Their wants & needs
  • Getting help
  • Sharing feelings
  • Asking questions
  • Getting information
Why Pair Sensory & Communication?

• Students with V&MD struggle with generalizing skills and learning out of context
• Sensory activities provide a rich set of experiences to communicate about
• Mirrors the way typical kids learn
• Pairing the two makes limited time at school more effective
Sensory Activities

What types of sensory activities do you use?
Communication Skills

What types of communication skills do you target?
What does Communication look like?

- Light Tech:
  - Objects or partial objects
  - Tactile symbols
  - Line drawings/symbols
  - Photographs
  - Sight words or Braille
What does Communication look like?

- AAC Systems:
  - Using photos or symbols
  - With or without auditory feedback
What does Literacy look like?

For most V&MD students,

- Comm & Lit often look very similar
- Most can not physically write, type, or spell to make words
- Reading a symbol from their own system receptively
- Using their symbols to make lists and phrases
- Telling someone what to write for them
Infusing Sensory with Comm & Lit – What does it look like?

- Providing rich sensory experiences
- Multiple opportunities to talk about the activity while doing it
- Writing or telling about the activity after it is finished
- Making it easy for others to implement
My Solution: Sensory Boxes

- A self-contained box with all items for an activity
- Theme based & used repeatedly
- Includes:
  - All sensory items needed
  - Books about the activity
  - All communication tools needed
  - All writing tools needed
Effectively Using Sensory Materials

Repeated experiences with the same items

• Mirrors typical early learning
• Helps develop communication
• Gives repeated chances to learn critical skills
• Works with a slower response time
• Encourages experimentation with the items
• Gets more mileage out of time spent on materials
A Series of Comm & Lit Based Sensory Experiences

- Initial Experiences – sensory focused
- Early Activities – focus on communication
- Extending Literacy – reading and writing
- Extending Learning – exploring & comparing
- Publishing – creating something to share with others
Initial Experiences

Mirrors pre-teaching in regular ed

• Exploring the materials
  • Target asking questions - what do they do
  • Explore descriptive properties

• Modeling & teaching associated language
  • Teach how to say new nouns, verbs & adj/adv
  • Review how to say words they know – people, feelings, quick words
Instruments:
Exploring what they do;
Asking questions
Early Activities – Focus on Comm

• Using the materials for a purpose
  • Model & assist using the nouns, verbs & adj/adv
  • Target using words they know: people, feelings, quick words
  • Target asking questions

• Talking and/or writing about the experience
  • Target using some new vocabulary
  • Write about how they felt about it, who did it, what they did, etc.
Dress Up:
During – more and finished
After – Like or Don’t Like
Activities to Extend Literacy

• Reading books about the activity & using items
  • Existing books
  • Teacher made books using pics from early activities
  • Use items as props during reading

< Pair Symbols & Text. Props: Play it while we read. >
Activities to Extend Literacy

• Other writing – journals, letters, lists
  • Lists – Things we Like/Don’t Like, Who Liked It, etc.
  • Letters – write to parents or friends about it
  • Journals – how I felt about it

Lists: Who liked it?
Extending Learning

• Using the items in a new way
  • Watch what students do, try using in new ways
  • Ex – drop instruments, what happens
  • Ex – can we put clothes on different body parts

• Comparing the experiences
  • List what was funny, awful
  • Compare & contrast

• Extension crafts & other related activities
Instruments: Can our switch toys play the instruments?

Winter Clothes: Extension activity, making snow.

Extending Learning
Publishing the Experience

• Writing your own book
  • Use pictures from the teacher made book
  • Use pictures taken during the activities
  • Talk about the pictures
  • Have students write their own words

• Reading your own book
  • Practice reading at school to others
  • Send copies home
  • Make comments while someone else reads
  • Act out the book while reading
Name & Date:        4-2-13
What is it? I have something, can you guess what it is?
It looks (describing) color: pink.
I feel (feeling) more play____ when I hold it.
Modifying for Different Skill Levels

• Higher Skills
  • Writing word by word
  • Reading what others wrote
  • Pair up, target answering questions

Word-by-word: “Glasses + on + me”
Modifying for Different Skill Levels

• Emergent Skills
  • Focus on asking questions or using quick words (more, done, my turn, your turn, great, yuck)
  • Use objects to make choices
  • Indicate preferences with body language
Making it Easier for Staff

Daily execution is usually done by classroom assistants
- Make it easy to set up – everything in one box or area
- Include items for communication and writing for all students - a variety of symbol types
- Model activities first with staff assisting, then switch
- Have a way to record writing permanently
- Make it fun for the adults too
Summary

Providing a continuum of sensory experiences that infuse meaningful communication and literacy into hands-on experiences is the best way for us to support growth for students with V&MDs.

- Questions & Comments?
- Contact Faye Gonzalez at fayegonzalez@live.com