



Habilitation Outreach for
Professionals in Education

HOPE Note

Issues in Reading

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Auditory access provided by the cochlear implant has enabled many children to make substantial gains in spoken language development. The critical role that well-developed spoken language plays in the development of literacy skills cannot be overstated. Thus, it follows that children with cochlear implants may bring skills to the reading task that might assist them, first, in learning to read and, later, in reading to learn. The following HOPE Note explores the relationship between auditory access and the development of reading comprehension.

Building Skills that Support Reading

It is well documented that children who have plentiful and pleasurable experiences with books at a young age have a greater chance of becoming proficient readers in later years. Reading aloud to children from the moment they have auditory access begins the process of vocabulary stockpiling that will contribute to future reading success in school. Developing the critical thinking skills required for reading with real comprehension can begin during read-alouds before any formal reading instruction is undertaken. Parents and early interventionists can assist a child in:

- **Making connections** between stories and life experiences to set the stage for independently building meaning from text.
- **Getting the main idea** through telling or retelling a story.
- **Sequencing events** by recalling the events of a story in proper order.

- **Predicting the outcome** of a new story, which allows a child to play an active role in book sharing even before decoding, is expected.
- **Making inferences** by “reading between the lines” and “filling in” from personal knowledge and what makes sense.
- **Drawing conclusions** by piecing together bits of information in a story to come up with an idea that is not expressly stated.

Breaking the Code

As the child with a cochlear implant matures, there are a number of ways in which he/she will be asked to recognize, in print, the words stored in the spoken language vocabulary. There are essentially two main approaches to beginning reading.

- **Phonics-based approaches** require that a child learns rule-governed, sound-symbol relationships. These rules are applied to text in a process called decoding. Children with severe-to-profound hearing loss who use cochlear implants are in a unique position to take advantage of phonic-based approaches because of the auditory information provided by implant technology. The ability to hear the consonant and vowel sounds of spoken language creates the first link in pairing the speech sound to a visual (letter) representation of that sound.





When these symbols are combined, recognizable words can then be identified. This is the start of reading.

- **Whole language approaches** enlist a child's own knowledge and experiential base for early reading. In whole language, children are encouraged to make connections between their background knowledge (all that is known about the world) and what they see in print to build meaning from text. The cochlear implant affords children the opportunity to access their store of experiences and spoken language representations of those experiences to assist in recall and retrieval in reading. For example, children who have been to the zoo and have had rich experiences there may then more easily read a story about animals that takes place in a zoo setting.

Reading with Comprehension

Whether a child learns to read via a phonics-based or whole-language approach, subsequent reading with real comprehension will become more challenging as the vocabulary, syntax and themes of the text become increasingly more complex. Assisting the child in developing strategies and techniques that will allow for continued vocabulary growth, adjusting purposes for reading and monitoring comprehension will be necessary components of formal reading instruction in the later elementary years and beyond.

Successful readers are often those with positive experiences with books, words and language from the earliest years. Nurturing a child's early love of reading may yield outcomes that cannot be measured for many years. This investment is well worth both the immediate results and long-term benefits of creating life-long readers and learners.

Related Resources

Fountas, S., & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press.

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Robertson, L. (2000). *Literacy Learning for Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*. Washington D.C: AG Bell Publications.

Spencer, L., Barker, B., & Tomblin, J. (2003). Exploring the Language and Literacy Outcomes of Pediatric Cochlear Implant Users. *Ear and Hearing*, 24, 236-248.

Trelease, J. (2001). *The Read Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penquin Books.

Wilkes, E. (2005). Trends in Literacy Research and Factors Affecting Literacy Achievement in Children with Hearing Loss. *The Listener: Journal of the Learning to Listen Foundation*. pp 112 - 121.

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