

# **The Process and Stages of Literacy Development**

The process of literacy development is largely believed to occur across five discrete stages. It is sometimes possible for children to progress through two stages simultaneously.

## **1. Emergent Readers and Spellers**

The critical skills at this level are the development of phonemic and phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate letter sounds. When children have established phonological awareness, they can successfully connect letter sounds to the written letters and identify basic words. Learners at this stage may repeatedly write words but may not be able to understand why words are spelled certain ways.

## **2. Alphabetic Readers and Spellers**

This is the stage where children begin to more consistently read basic words and begin to learn sight words. It is also during this stage of literacy development that children engage in picture reading i.e. They identify words by using pictures as context clues. Many children will now rely on word attack skills to decode unknown words. You will commonly notice that children isolate individual letter sounds then put the sounds back together again. eg. "mat" is divided into /m/ /a/ /t/ then read as mat. It is obvious then that students need to receive formal reading instruction at this stage of their literacy development.

## **3. Word Pattern Readers and Spellers**

This is a crucial stage as students are expected to demonstrate greater independence as readers in all subject areas. Undoubtedly, this is the stage with the widest age gap and the greatest variation in skills between individual students. It is at this point that one will recognize increased reading fluency. It is marked by a noticeable change in how students read and spell.

Many begin to understand patterns in words and are able to transfer such patterns to other words in by the process of chunking. Students also begin to use known words as context clues for decoding and understanding unfamiliar words.

## **4. Syllables and Affixes**

In this fourth stage of literacy development, children engage with texts that contain multi-syllabic words. They also learn and understand the meanings of root words and how they are altered by the addition of affixes (prefixes and suffixes). Students also learn more complex comprehension skills as they are now able to read with greater independence, fluency and accuracy.

It is at this stage that children will intentionally read for the sheer pleasure it brings. They will be somewhat motivated to engage in cross-curricula reading to increase their knowledge around specific topics or areas of interest. It is crucial that students have unfettered access to dictionaries and thesauruses to foster greater independence and comprehension of text.

## **5. Derivational Relations**

This final stage of literacy development is referred to as the *advanced stage of literacy development*. This occurs when

“emergent readers morph into fully independent readers”, and spans into adulthood. Students now recognize and develop deeper comprehension, recognizing that several words share the same base word. Children advance to this stage at varying times and with differing degrees of comprehension. At this point in school some children develop a greater affinity for analyzing literature and making critical judgement. As was the case in the “*Syllables and Affixes*” stage, it is even more crucial that students have unfettered access to dictionaries and thesauruses to solidify their comprehension of text.

### **Embracing the Challenges = Successes**

In Bright Minds, we understand and recognize that students join us at differing levels and stages in the development of their literacy skills. When children lack the foundational skills, this mitigates against their learning and places them at a disadvantage. All instruction and opportunities for practice are specifically selected and intentionally targeted to the students' current level of functioning and their presenting needs.

As students progress toward mastery in a given stage of literacy development, these building blocks are used to advance to the next stage or level. Because the acquisition of literacy skills does not follow a linear trajectory, some children will exhibit strengths in one area and regression in another. Where there are no extenuating circumstances, such children will typically transition successfully to the next stage with targeted and consistent practice overtime.