The Beginning Literacy Framework™

Helping Educators:
- *identify, create and modify text for beginning readers*
- *meet literacy goals of students with multiple disabilities in their earliest stages of literacy*

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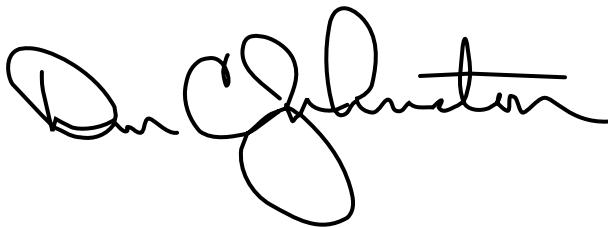President, Don Johnston Incorporated

Don's Vision

I believe that *all* students deserve the opportunities and experiences that foster literacy success. Literacy for every student is not my vision alone, but one that I share with every contributor of this Framework. Because I, myself, did not read until the ninth grade, I understand the disappointment and hardship that accompanies illiteracy. Feeling frustrated and defeated holds students back. This blocks students from learning. The sad result is that students remain below the threshold of success.

You can change that! Some multiply-disabled students may never move into age-level reading. But, these students *can* achieve a level of literacy that permits them to participate more productively as a member of society. **"No Child Left Behind"** *means none*— **and, none includes the students that have more profound cognitive and physical disabilities**. It is time for educators to raise expectations. It is my life's goal, and the goal of my company, to help educators not only meet those raised expectations, but exceed them!

The Beginning Literacy Framework is revolutionary because it is the first approach designed to help educators assess emergent reading behaviors while plainly outlining the incremental steps that move these beginning readers forward. A number of literacy experts talk about the invisible line that is crossed by regularly developing students when they move from being a non-reader to a reader. It just seems to happen one day, sometimes without any kind of instruction. For our kids though, this doesn't happen as invisibly, or in a single day's time. It can take months and years of experience with printed language—remember this as you're setting student goals.

The Beginning Literacy Framework was developed by experts in literacy, experts in teaching multiply-disabled students to become readers and experts in learning interventions. It will help you identify appropriate leveled materials and it will help you use BuildAbility to create them. I'm excited about collaborating with these experts, and I'm excited about collaborating with you to eliminate illiteracy in our nation—for all students.

Charter

We began this project with the goal of creating a framework that would guide the development of electronic books geared toward school-aged students with the most severe multiple disabilities. As we made progress in defining the framework and understanding the power of BuildAbility as a tool for authoring electronic books, we began to understand that we had been successful in developing a framework that would address our original goal and a much broader population of school-age students with disabilities who read at beginning levels despite their age or the nature of their disability. Roughly 90% of students with multiple disabilities never learn to read above the 2nd grade level (Koppenhaver & Yoder, 1992). While the numbers are not quite as dramatic for students with milder disabilities, results on the most recent National Assessment for Educational Progress (2000) suggest that approximately 10% of all fourth grade students read at the 2nd grade level or below.

Students Get Stuck

The fact is that too many students with disabilities get 'stuck' at the emergent literacy level. This means that they may listen to text for enjoyment, gain information from listening, and participate actively in reading activities, but they are not able to independently read new text that is presented to them. This clearly limits students' ability to be competitive in school and to gain information independently.

- Most popular approaches for leveling early literacy materials contain steps too large to show progress for our students
- Limited availability for materials at the earliest levels
- Materials available are uninteresting and not age-appropriate

Lack of Appropriate Materials

The opportunity to read appropriately-leveled materials is essential to early reading success. Students can learn word-reading and comprehension strategies without materials that are exactly at the right level, but they cannot learn to independently apply those strategies without daily opportunities to read text at their level.

Beginning readers need:
- Multiple levels of text at many different levels of literacy
- Age-appropriate and engaging materials
- Electronic text to meet accessibility issues
- Literature that fits into the curriculum at their readability level

The "Buck" Stops Here

As teachers, we often find that appropriate materials do not exist for our students. We often find we have to modify, create or search for appropriate materials. As an industry, we need to be able to identify and/or create materials that are not only age-appropriate and engaging for students, but that also fit their literacy skill level.

Students Need:

- **Materials that Match their Ability** We must understand the literacy skill of the student and match materials to their skill level. Providing materials and instructional support so that the students can advance in their literacy skills is critical.
- **Opportunities to Read** Making sure electronic materials provide students with opportunities to read is crucial. So often we have the computer read everything to our students. They sometimes need less support and more opportunities to read parts of text, to make up their own stories (pretend to read) while looking at books and opportunities to read conventional text.
- **Standards-based Materials** Providing materials that are relevant and tied to curricular standards is an increasing need. This impacts student participation, inclusion and accountability.

Summary of Shifts Needed
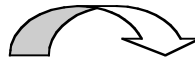
Provide opportunities for
literacy experiences   →   Provide opportunities for
                                                                      literacy experiences AND
                                                                      Provide literacy instruction

Instruction focused on emerging skills only →   Variety of instructional supports and
                                                                      strategies based on student's level

1 level of text—
Emergent   →   3 levels of text—
                                                                      Emergent, Transitional, Conventional
                                                                      Text is matched to the student's
                                                                      literacy goals

The Beginning Literacy Framework— The Framework for Success

The purpose of this project is to provide you with a framework you can use in identifying and creating appropriately-leveled reading materials. This framework is the culmination of expertise ranging from leading literacy and assistive technology experts to district curriculum adapters, assistive technology coordinators, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and special education teachers. This diverse group of experts came together in common accord, believing that all students can achieve some degree of literacy and with the goal of helping to create a framework for educators that is easy to understand and, with the supports provided in BuildAbility, easy to use.

Levels of Literacy: A Definition

Many organizations and publishers have 'levels' of reading. These publishers all recognize the need to provide individual students with text at the appropriate reading level. Many of these publishers provide as many as twenty levels at a single grade level. Most of these materials start at a level where a student is a conventional reader. There are no levels prior to this—no materials appropriate for our students.

One Level—Easy—Is Not Enough

The Don Johnston Beginning Literacy Framework guides the creation of appropriately-leveled materials for beginning reading levels (emergent through the end of grade l) without applying the specificity that would restrict its use to a particular reading approach. In other words, the Framework provides three distinct levels (Emergent, Transitional and Conventional) where there has historically been one (easy). It clearly articulates the divisions between emergent and early literacy learning. This framework also provides guidance regarding movement from one level to the next and can be applied across age levels.

The authors have used literature on early literacy to develop a framework that describes the features of text across three levels, plus specific instructional supports that will yield student success at each level. A description of each of the text features is provided in feature charts: Content Features (topics, # of pages, # words per page, presence of rhythm, rhyme, etc.); Print Features (appearance, placement); and Graphics Features (purpose, use of symbols within text, use of symbols as graphics, placement, and simplicity). In addition, we describe student-indicators that will guide appropriate matching of individual students and the three levels.

3 Levels of Text

Emergent

The text in books at this level is often the most lengthy and complex of the three types discussed in this framework.

Texts at the Emergent Level are designed to:
- Develop language
- Build background knowledge
- Support learning concepts about print and the reading experience
- Engage and develop the love of reading

Therefore, text and graphics at this level can be rich. These books are almost always read to the student, but student participation is often encouraged. We never stop reading books to our students. As they develop their literacy skills, books should be chosen that include more complex ideas, concepts, story lines and language patterns.
As a student moves beyond this reading level, we need to continue to provide emergent materials that are challenging and just beyond the student's readability level. Readers are ever-emergent as they expand their vocabulary and build their background knowledge.

Transitional

Planning instruction that supports students in moving from emergent literacy to conventional literacy is challenging under the best of circumstances. While the reading literature has yet to label this transition, there is no question that there is a period before students are independently reading new materials during which time it is no longer appropriate to describe them as emergent readers and writers. For most young children without disabilities, this transition happens rapidly. Often parents, teachers, and children aren't quite sure how or when it happened. Suddenly, the child was reading. For students with disabilities, this transition often lasts for an extended period of time. The challenge is to encourage educational teams, parents and students to keep up the effort long enough by providing materials the continue moving the student through the literacy-learning continuum.

Texts at the Transitional Level are designed to:
- Provide an increased focus on text, rather than the language and graphics components
- Support students in using the skills and strategies they developed through experiences with emergent texts and other print-based activities
- Support students in developing simple word-reading strategies

For example, repeated lines are interspersed with pages that have a single word that matches an illustration. In general, these books look easier than Emergent level books in terms of the language, vocabulary and word-reading complexity since students will eventually be reading these books independently.

Conventional

There are many different terms used to describe readers and writers at this level. Essentially, they are using word-based strategies to read both familiar and unfamiliar words in texts. Within this framework, conventional texts often appear to be the easiest of the three text types. That is because, at this level, the focus is on independent application of word reading strategies. To achieve this, the scaffolds of rhyme, rhythm, predictability, and repetition have been minimized, as have the demands of language, text complexity, and sentence-structure diversity.

Texts at the Conventional Level are designed to:
- Introduce new vocabulary within controlled text
- Foster word recognition and decoding skills
- Remove predictability, helping students apply knowledge about sentence structure

Text Features

Emergent	Transitional	Conventional
- Language rich text - Variety of sentence patterns - Complex sentences are acceptable - Blends of language structures - Language-rich graphics - Detailed graphics that can tell the story and go beyond - Opportunities for vocabulary expansion - Readability of individual words not critical-interest and engagement are critical - Some rhyme, rhythm, repetition and/or predictability that creates engagement	- Simple and consistent sentence structures within a single book - High degree of rhyme, rhythm. repetition and/or predictability - Mix of text that is beyond the student's reading level (for engagement) with text that student can read with support - Close picture-to-text match when independent text reading is expected - Stories can be as long as emergent books if text is interspersed with pages for students to independently read - (i.e. pages with 1 or 2 predictable words)	- Simple text - Simple sentence structure - Minimal use of pronouns to avoid confusion with referents - Consistent sentence structures within a given book - Heavy repetition of individual words within a given book - Heavy use of high frequency and decodable words - Length of story is short - Minimal cueing with graphics and other scaffolds.

Emergent

Students are in the very beginning stage of literacy. There are NO prerequisites. There is no such thing as 'not ready for'!

Emergent
▪ Language rich text
▪ Variety of sentence patterns
▪ Complex sentences are acceptable
▪ Blends of language structures
▪ Language rich graphics
▪ Detailed graphics that can tell the story and go beyond
▪ Opportunities for vocabulary expansion
▪ Readability of individual words not critical-interest and engagement are critical
▪ Rhyme, rhythm, repetition and/or predictability that creates engagement
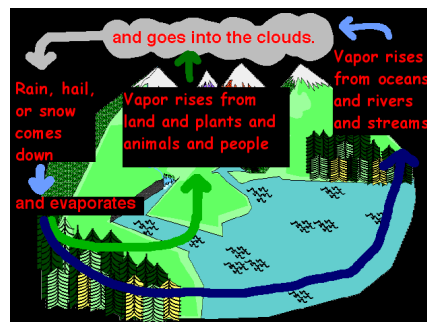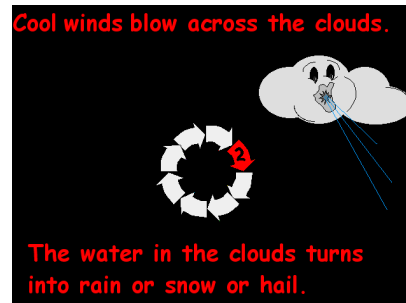
You can be confident that your student is in need of more experience with books at the Emergent Level if the following apply:
- Minimal-to-no interest in text
- Little attention during book reading or elsewhere
- No comprehension of graphics
- Apparent disinterest in computers
- Struggling or inconsistent access to the computer
- Minimal engagement with a communication partner
- Minimal engagement during read-alouds

Inclusion Issues

Students at the Emergent Level are often easiest to include in general education classrooms because there is no expectation that they will have daily access to texts they can read independently. The content from the general education classroom provides a wealth of topics and concepts around which to develop materials. Take care to develop Emergent Level books that include language structures and vocabulary that are at or just beyond the student's current level of understanding.

Instructional Insights
- Allow for lots of repetition with the same materials
- Give exposure to lots of different types of materials
- Watch for student responses and start to identify student preferences
- Get students interacting with the book. Ask about graphics, allow students to participate in reading especially with repeated lines, make predictions about words
- Relate everything possible to the student's own life and experience

Literacy Goals
- Develop concepts about print
  - Knowledge that print carries the meaning
  - Graphics support meaning but do not tell the entire story
  - There is a 1 to 1 correspondence between spoken and written words
  - Print has directionality and orientation (beginning, end of the book, page forward and backward, read the left page before the right page, read top to bottom, read left to right)
- Student begins to see himself as a reader
- Student expresses preferences as a reader
- Student interacts with others during story reading

Transitional Literacy

Transitional readers can read and understand familiar text (e.g., stories for which they have had multiple exposures). They have few if any strategies for reading words on their own and are inconsistent in reading even familiar words across a variety of contexts.

Transitional
- Simple and consistent sentence structures within a single book
- High degree of rhyme, rhythm, repetition and/or predictability
- Mix of text that is beyond reading level (for engagement) with text that student can read with support
- Close picture-to-text match when independent text reading is expected
- Stories can be as long as emergent books if text is interspersed with pages for students to independently read (i.e. pages with 1 or 2 words)

I need air.
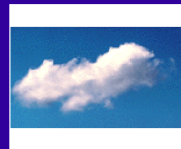
I need water.

You can be confident that your student is in need of more experience with books at the Transitional Level if the following apply:
- Shows interest and engagement in text
- Attends to graphics
- Interacts with the person reading the story
- Can identify a handful of letters or words (even if inconsistent)
- Can utilize rhyme, rhythm and/or repetition
- Can fill in repeated lines (repetition)
- Can predict a rhyming word (rhyme)
- Rocks or claps in sync with a story (rhythm)

Inclusion Issues
The increased expectation for exposure to text with specific features may require increased creation of materials for students at this level. Reading partners without disabilities should be made fully aware of the words, phrases and lines of text that the student is expected to read independently. Repeated opportunities to engage in shared reading of appropriately-leveled text must be provided each day to support the transition to texts at the Conventional Level.

Instructional Insights
- Start to expect students to independently read some of the words in connected text.
- Encourage the use of cues including initial letter, repetition or rhythm of text and pictures.
- Increase opportunities for repetition by selecting preferred books and other text types.
- During this level, it is important to read the same text multiple times.
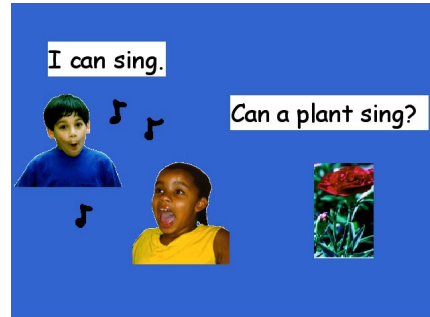
Literacy Goals
- Begin to use simple decoding strategies
  - First letter
  - Word length
  - Picture clue
  - Number of words on a page
  - Visual presentation of words (font/color/placement)
- Begin to recognize personally relevant letters and words
- Read familiar text independently in different contexts
- Recognize most of the letters most of the time
  - Upper case
  - Lower case
- Tell/re-tell a story based on a familiar book
- Recognize environmental print across contexts (i.e. Exit sign, Coke logo)
- Read appropriate parts of a familiar book without support.

Conventional Literacy

Conventional readers can independently decode and understand unfamiliar text at their level.

Conventional
▪ Simple text
▪ Simple sentence structure
▪ Minimal use of pronouns to avoid confusion with referents
▪ Consistent sentence structures within a given book
▪ Heavy repetition of individual words within a given book
▪ Heavy use of high frequency and decodable words
▪ Length of story is short
▪ Minimal cueing with graphics and other scaffolds.

You can be confident that your student is in need of more experience with books at the Conventional Level if the following apply:
- Uses simple decoding strategies
    - Number of words on the page ("Old Black Fly"-child reads, "Shoo Fly Shoo Fly Shoo Fly Shoo")
    - Rhyme, Rhythm/Repetition ("Brown bear"-Child reads, "animal name, animal name, what do you see")
- Typical inaccuracies
    - Length of word (correct word is elephant-child guesses hippopotamus)
    - First letter (correct word is mother-child guesses mister)
    - First letter plus picture (correct word is swing, child guesses slide by looking at a picture of a playground and seeing the letter s)

Inclusion Issues
Beyond the youngest ages, students who have successfully made the transition to the Conventional level are often the most difficult to include. These students have demonstrated their ability to make progress in reading and writing. The need to make sure their progress continues often becomes an urgent need. Students at the conventional level require continuous opportunities to read and reread text at their level for a variety of purposes. There is a great demand for materials that relate to curriculum content and also meet the reading level needs of the student.

Instructional Insights
- Make sure the emphasis is not completely on word identification and phonics at this level.
- Provide daily, meaningful purposes for reading and reading text at the right level.
- Provide access to more than 6 different books and other texts at the appropriate level EVERY day.

Literacy Goals
- 50-75 sight words read in context across a variety of texts
- Consistently uses first letter plus picture cue
- Recognizes spelling patterns within words
- Can read very easy, unfamiliar texts independently
- Can read easy texts (including SOME of these features)
  - High frequency words
  - Limited number of different words presented
  - Highly predictable
  - Picture support
  - High percentage of decodable words (child has already learned the phonemes or patterns to decode these words)

Text Acquisition Skills in Developing Readers
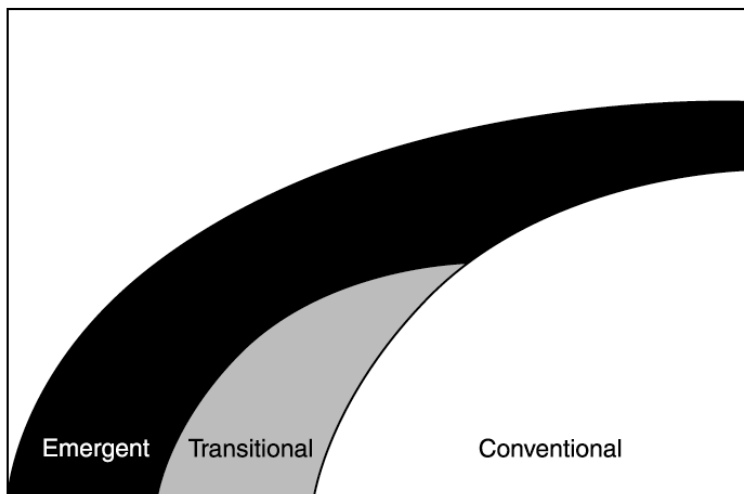
BuildAbility®: The Easiest Multimedia Tool for Early Literacy

BuildAbility truly compliments the Beginning Literacy Framework. It is a great tool for creating, modifying and distributing stories that employ the Framework.

Authoring Tool	Reading Tool
▪ Create Materials Quickly	▪ Switch -accessible
▪ Effortlessly combine text, graphics, speech and sound support	▪ Story Selector allows students to choose stories included on the Sampler CD or teacher created stories—choosing is a critical emerging literacy skill
▪ Easily highlight and speak words	▪ The Player is included so that stories can be read at home, from a CD or sent via e-mail
▪ Use Drawmation™ to stress critical elements or concepts within the story	▪ Books can be printed

BuildAbility is the easiest-to-use-authoring tool for building rich, single-switch early literacy activities and lessons. Educators can build a complete multimedia page in just four easy steps—draw or choose a picture, add text, add sound and select the page advancement. Create stories in sequence, preview and edit at any time. The one-click toolbar lets you add the next graphic, text sound, movie, your voice student voices and the single-switch option. BuildAbility activities are easily shared with other teachers and parents with the free BuildAbility Player. Get started with the more than 20 literacy activities created by Caroline Musselwhite, Patti Rae and other literacy experts.

Planning Guide

Curriculum Standard(s)/Goals:
- Knows the basic structure and functions of the human body's systems
- Knows the basic needs of plants and animals

Literacy Standard(s)/Goal:
- Creates mental images from pictures and print
- Uses meaning clues
- Relates stories to personal experiences
- Relates new information to prior knowledge and experience
- Recites and responds to familiar stories, poems and rhymes with patterns
- Listens and responds to a variety of media
- Makes contributions in class and group discussions

Key Concepts: Wellness, Basic Needs

Print Concepts:
- Understands that print conveys meaning
- Understands how print is organized and read

Story Title:	Your Body Is Like A Car	Every Day!
Text Level:	Transitional	Conventional
Key Vocabulary:	body, you, food, water, shoes, car, gas, oil, tires	Eat, good, drink, water, every day
High Frequency Words:	your, body, is, like, a, car, need, you, food, water, good, might, too	Eat, well, every, day, put, good, food, on, your, you, say, water, is, what, say, no, way, work, out, I, may
Decodable Words:	is, car, cars, gas	Well, put, on, drink, is, no
Story Text:	"Your body is important. Your body is like a machine. Take care of your body. It's up to you!" Your body is like a car. Cars need gas. You need food. Cars need oil. You need water. Cars need tires. You need shoes. Cars need a good washing. You might too!	Eat well every day. Okay. Put good food on your tray. Whatever you say. Drink water every day. Okay. Eight glasses is what doctors say. No way! Work out every day. I may.

Watch for our newest Essential Interventions Kit

Teaching Beginning Reading with BuildAbility