

GITWL 2017, New Orleans, LA

**Parents as Cooperation Partners in the Progress of Literacy,
Especially in Inclusive Settings**

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My colleague and I, we are teachers for visually impaired students. Annette for blind students and I work with low vision students.

2

We live and work in Schleswig-Holstein.

3

Schleswig Holstein is one of 16 States (we called it Bundesländer) in Germany.

4

The northern most State in Germany. It is in between the North Sea and Baltic Sea; not far from the Danish border.

Each of these states has its own state government and school policy.

Schleswig-Holstein is the only state in Germany that does not have a special school for visually impaired students. All our students visit the schools at their place of residence ("Mainstreamed") and are advised and supported by our resource center.

5 The State Resource Center in Schleswig

The State Resource Center for Visually Impaired in Schleswig offers support and training to families and professionals serving blind and low vision children and young adults, including those with additional disabilities throughout Schleswig-Holstein. The students visit their home schools to be able to live and learn in their home environment.

The staff members (about 80) of the center network and cooperate with other institutions and members of the student's social background who are involved in their educational process.

1. Support

Support and consulting which is provided by five professional teams depending on the students' needs in inclusive settings. The contents focus on diagnostic, consultation with parents, teachers and other people, that means to provide inservice trainings regarding visual impairment and adaptations for lessons as well as training and use of specific visual aids for the visual impaired students.

2. Seminars

Seminars and inservice trainings are offered for colleagues of organizations involved in the educational process for children and young adults with visual impairments. The seminars focus on the needs of the students, for example the knowledge of how to adapt material to optimize the learning process of the students in their learning environment.

3. Courses

Courses for students and family weekends are offered to children and young adults with visual impairments as well as to their families. The courses take place at the Resource Centre in Schleswig. Normally they start on Tuesday evening with dinner and end on Friday after lunch. The goal of the courses is on developing and strengthening self-confidence and social competencies as well as teaching skills, special knowledge of how to deal with the individual visual impairment. The opportunity of exchanging ideas and meeting other students with visual impairments is a valuable asset of the courses, also for the parents.

6 Parents as Cooperation Partners

In this workshop, we focus on parents as important cooperation partners in the reading experience process of their children.

By reading, many of the low vision students have problems and parents want to get support. So

1. Parents can join courses

- a. They gain knowledge about reading processes
- b. They can make exercises in simulation for self-awareness

c. They get exercise material for their children

2. Parents can get individual support at home

What are the most important offerings we can provide to parents of visually impaired children?

7 1. Reading aloud

1. Reading aloud increases reading comprehension

A study with 2,500 primary school students in Germany has shown that reading aloud four times a week (10-15 minutes each) significantly increased the children's reading comprehension and fluency after six months.

8 1. Reading aloud

What concrete help can we offer to parents?

A: We can encourage parents to help their children learn to read by simply reading aloud.

1. Parents are very important role models for their children. The acceptance and motivation to read is usually less pronounced with boys. That's why in Germany certain foundations are trying to motivate men to read aloud.
2. Parents can increase the children's reading comprehension and reading fluency by reading aloud.

B: We can assist parents with book recommendations.

9 1. Reading aloud

When the kids start school, parents should not read aloud *less*; they should read aloud *more*.

10 1. Reading aloud

Not in all families reading is an important component in everyday life. There are families that have no books at home. Parents who do not want to read or cannot read aloud. Of course, we have to accept that and try to offer

alternatives. Because reading aloud remains an important element in the reading experience process. Therefore the children have no disadvantages, we offer books with corresponding CDs.

11-13 *1. Reading aloud*

Let's read a section out of the book as an example. The pages can be tracked in the Power point Presentation.

14 *1. Reading aloud*

Reading pens are another way of reading aloud. There are many matching books. We show an German book as an example.

15 *1. Reading aloud*

Two different reading aloud modes are demonstrated ("reading aloud/out loud" mode and "reading-together" mode).

16 *2. Regular Training*

2. A regular reading training is indispensable.

Many parents are keen that their children are successful at school and are also willing to support their children. Often, however, parents need suggestions, materials and ideas on how to practice with their children.

3 things are very important in which we as teacher can support parents:

- a. Diagnostics
- b. Setting
- c. Exercise Material

17 *2. Regular Training*

At what level of performance are the children? Can they already read individual words? Can they already work out sentences or smaller texts?

Which enlargement/magnification does the children need? Decisive here is that we reach an enlargement/a magnification in the comfort zone while reading.

There are tests that measure the magnification requirements.

Can the children follow the reading direction? If not, you can support them with reading templates.

18 *2. Regular Training*

For reading, the visually impaired children need good contrasts, so good light is necessary. Many manufacturers have developed special luminaires for this purpose. We also support parents on this topic.

19 *2. Regular Training*

Enlarging/ Magnification aids are paid by the health insurance companies. We also test them with the children in the parents' home and assist with the application.

20 *2. Regular Training*

Colored reading overlays can help some children to better consolidate the reading experience and increase the contrasting effect.

21 *2. Regular Training*

I would now like to briefly introduce some of the materials that we offer parents to practice with their children.

22 *2. Regular Training*

Reading vans, which are available in different levels, are a simple learning material.

Books and materials have also proven themselves using the syllabic method. The syllables are written alternately in blue and red.

23 *2. Regular Training*

In order to increase the flow of reading, significant words (the 100 most important words of the German language) are printed on cards and given to parents to practice. The times the child needs to read all the words are

stopped and documented. The children can recognize their own reading progress after a short time.

24 *2. Regular Training*

There are books that are bilingual, and the title of this book already shows a difference between English and German. In English you say saturday soup - two words, in the German language that becomes one word. In the English language you can name an object more precisely and a sentence is created. In the German language it remains one word.

25 *2. Regular Training*

Practicing long words is important and you can do that with word pyramids. In addition, there are games in stores and many self-made cards that parents can borrow to practice with their children.

26 *2. Regular Training*

Of course, the same exercise is also available with sentences.

27 *2. Regular Training*

I would like to point out a link that I pass on to the parents. You probably already know it: **<https://tarheelreader.org>** . With this platform you can access many books on different topics. These are offered in different languages. Since you can change the font and the background colour and the presentation, this is particularly suitable for visually impaired children.

There are many book series that allow parents and children to read together. I would like to show you how the books are structured using this example. The ongoing text is divided into longer sections that are read by the parents and short sections that the children read.

28 *2. Regular Training*

Reading children

29 Requirements for a successful literacy process for blind children

What are the requirements for a successful literacy process for blind children?

„Reading aloud is the mother of reading.“ (Goethe)

„Regularly reading aloud (and then involving children in a dialogue) seems to be the most important activity for enhancing reading skills.“

(Brügelmann 1995)

"The acceptance of the selected writing medium (Braille or black print) and thus the success in written language acquisition depends largely on the attitude of the caregivers." (Lang, 2008)

1. Reading aloud
2. Acceptance of Braille

30 The significance of parent participation in learning literacy

Which competences do you need?

1. Reading aloud: Which methods are available? What materials are available for shared reading times?
2. Parents accept Braille as their blind child's writing system and learn Braille

One way we offer parents to learn these skills is through courses for parents

31 The Sense of courses for parents

- Parents who have a blind child meet with each other
- Parents share their experiences and challenges in family, kindergarten, preschool and school
- Parents strengthen each other
- Parents pass on their skills
- Parents learn together

32 Course for parents of blind children - an example

Below I introduce a course for parents of blind children. Invited were parents whose blind child is already in school and parents whose blind child is in kindergarten or preschool.

The program:

- Friday afternoon from 1.30 pm to 5 pm
- Introduction
- What questions to you have? What are the challenges?
- Coffee break
- "Tracking cards" Find a story!
- Information about Braille
- "Do it yourself" work at stations

Now I introduce the individual stations.

33 **Braille 1**

The parents get information about Louis Braille. They come explanations to the system of Braille.

34 **Braille 2**

The parents get an overview of tools for writing braille: from frame and stylus to Notebook with Braille-Display.

35 **Braille 3**

Then they get the opportunity to write Braille themselves with different tools. I encourage parents to try different machines. Often, they are very excited and happy when the first letters on the paper can be recognized.

They often take the chance to write a little message or name tag for their blind child.

36 **Braille 4**

They get a list with the Braille system. That helps them to write on their own.

37 **Braille 5**

With various printed worksheets they can playfully learn the shapes of the Braille letters. The worksheets are part of a program „Learning Braille for sighted“.

38 Braille 6

At the last station they can now test their acquired knowledge. Small worksheets in Braille are to be translated in print. Some parents then try to read the words and phrases with their fingers, others read Braille with their eyes.

39 Reading aloud 1 - The story of the lion who could not write

One of the famous books for reading aloud is: Der Löwe, der nicht schreiben konnte - The Lion who could not write.

This book is available in print, Braille with print text, tactile illustrations, a toolbox and a CD.

The story: The lion meets a pretty lioness who can read. The lion wants to meet the lioness and kiss her. From a missionary he has learned that one must first write a letter to a lady before kissing her. But there is a problem, the lion cannot write. So he seeks support from his friends. Neither the monkey, nor the hippopotamus, beetle, giraffe, etc. write the letter to the liking of the lion. He is very angry about that and roars. Then the lion meets the lioness and she asks him why he did not write himself. The lioness takes the lion with her. Now the lioness teaches the lion to read and write.

While the parents read aloud, I motivate them to take the Braille book and ask them to place their hands on the Braille words and move their hands from left to right as they read. The blind child can then put the hands on the parents and learn that reading has something to do with the movement of the hands from left to right.

This is especially important if the blind child did not have much experience with reading.

When the page is finished being reading, the image / tactile image can be viewed together. On the page with the illustration is a word in braille. The child can read the word or identify individual letters.

For the tactile illustrations, the animal models can be used for more illustration.

40 Reading aloud 2

I also used this material in family counseling. The family is from Macedonia. They have been in Germany for 1.5 years. The family consists of father, mother and twins. One of the twins has a vision impairment. He is learning German and Braille because the parents are talking Macedonian to the children and English with me.

We like sitting at the table with the whole family. Learning German words and Braille together. In "The Lion who could not write", new concepts, models and Braille words are intertwined.

41 Reading aloud 3 - The „Quest for the treasure“

It's a reading book for blind children which should initiate several actions instead of visual perceptions. It's about a little pirate searching for a treasure. Several small objects are enclosed in the book (little pirate box with small treasures,...) which are important elements of the story and can be fixed. As to the content, each double page forms one unit: on the left the text that is read aloud; on the right the corresponding „action page“.

The book can be used like a picture book for sighted children. Due to the text the child is able to develop a natural relation to written language. The text is in Braille as well as in print.

Parents read the text aloud. In a certain passage the child is required to look for a note. Then the child is supposed to explore the note and make assumptions.

If the child is familiar with the text after having listened to it several times, single words can be left out and added by the child. In case the child shows interest in written language or asks for single words, they can be read with the help of the parents.

42 **Reading aloud 4 - Revilo**

This book is about a boy in Brazil. His favorite activity is playing football. Parents can read the story to their children. Then they ask the child for the most interesting word which should be read on the page in Braille. The parents write the word and stick it on the page.

Additionally, the written word can be linked to language. For this purpose, a digital reading pen can be used. (Any Book Reader, Penfriend)

How does it work?

- The readers have to place a sticker on the page to be read and activate it with the pen.
- Then the passage is read out loud and recorded directly.

In turn, the children can use the lecture pen later to activate this sticker again and listen to the passage

Thus, the written word is associated with the pronunciation. Parents and children work together on the book. The blind children are actively involved in the design of the book.

43 **Reading aloud 5 - Learn to read with two people easier**

This program motivates beginner-readers to read a book because they do not read alone.

There are books with different contents.

The books are arranged so that the left side is read by a skilled reader (parent) and the right side by a beginner-reader. So it is read together. We have reworked this book so that the page for the beginner is also in Braille. A double page for the beginner is now designed so that the left side is in black and the right in Braille. Thus, parents can follow the Braille text.

44

picture of reworked double page

45 **Reading aloud 6 - Books from music cards** (idea of Anna Swenson)

In the parents' course, parents have the opportunity to make a book with music for their blind child and then take it home.

You need different music cards (happy birthday, ...) Two or three music cards are glued together. The parents think up a little story or a word, write it in braille. The Braille text/ word is then glued into the inside.

When you open it up and turn the pages, music sounds.

A simple, creative and fast way to make a book.

46

picture of music card book

47 **Braille to eat**

Slate and stylus with edible paper

- put a piece of edible paper in the slate and write a message with the stylus
- after reading the child could eat the paper

48 **Merry christmas - Braille biscuits**

- for family, kindergarten, preschool and school

Recipe:

Braille biscuits are biscuits which have raised chocolate dots placed in top of them in the formation of letters of the braille alphabet. Just follow this easy peasy recipe and help us to promote Braille literacy in this fun and popular way.

Ingredients:

150 grams of butter at room temperature

1 cup of flour

3/4 cup of icing sugar

Pinch of salt

1/2 cup of corn flour

Dark chocolate drops or buttons (the more raised the better)

Method:

1. Use the chopping blade in the food processor and place the first five ingredients in the work bowl. Process until a ball forms around the blade.
2. Remove from the food processor and form into a roll 4 cm in diameter.
3. Wrap in plastic wrap and place in the fridge for at least an hour.
4. When ready to bake slice into 5mm thick pieces and place on an ungreased baking tray.
5. Bake at 150 C for 15 minutes.
6. Place the biscuits on a wire rack to cool.
7. Now comes the fun part. Arrange the chocolate buttons, or drops, on top of each biscuit, placing the dots in the position of a Braille character. Secure them to the biscuit by melting a small amount of chocolate and spreading this on the base of the chocolate drop. Then stick the drop on the biscuit. The melted chocolate will harden to secure the chocolate braille dots in place.

You can have fun writing messages in Braille biscuits, using one Braille letter for each biscuit, making up a word with a group of biscuits. Words such as „congratulations“, „happy birthday“ or „braille is our game and reading is our aim“. Have fun!

49

Thank you!

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