**South Australian School for Vision Impaired Braille Butterflies Program:   
The metamorphosis to braille proficiency through a whole school approach to literacy**

**Skye Jones and Sharon Rattray**

**Through the evidence we have collected we believe that Braille Butterflies is an effective tactile reading program because:**

* Students are taught in class, by a qualified teacher of Vision Impairment, as part of the whole class group.
* Students are immersed in tactile experiences and develop strong pre-braille skills.
* Students are taught to read contracted braille from a young age and contractions are discussed as they appear in a text, even if they have not yet been formally taught.
* Students are immersed in braille throughout the school day and have access to resources in their preferred medium in all subject areas.
* Students with residual vision are encouraged to wear a blindfold for formal braille learning activities.

**South Australian School for Vision Impaired students are successful braille readers due to the introduction of:**

* A broad and balanced approach to teaching pre-braille reading and skills in the areas of: tactile exploration, fine motor skills, mathematical concepts, spatial awareness and small group work.
* A cohesive reading, writing and spelling program for emergent literacy in the early years of schooling followed by an explicit, systematic spelling program at a pace determined by individual students throughout their primary years.
* A daily 30 minute community reading block which is embraced by the whole school.

**Braille Butterflies: Pre-braille program**

The aim of the pre-braille Braille Butterflies program is to develop tactile sensitivity in the hands and fingers, through a variety of structured activities, leading to successful braille reading. This also strengthens wrists and fingers in preparation for using the Perkins Brailler, SMART Brailler and eventually a BrailleNote. Each day a specific theme is followed in order to give students a wide range of experiences in both pre-braille and tactile concepts. Tracking activities are integrated into every session.

**Monday:** Tactile exploration

Scanning an object, learning to use hands and finger tips enables the child to gain a complete picture of the item – its shape, size, texture, temperature, features, functions, comparison between objects. Students can use Moon-sand, sorting trays, feely bags, play dough, tinkering box and plasticine. Students are encouraged to use light touch with their fingertips.

**Tuesday:** Fine motor

Students develop wrist strength and finger dexterity through a range of activities including, pegging wet clothes onto a line, threading beads, opening jars and containers, copying patterns using magnetic and felt boards, hole punching, threading and finger puppets. As well as Perkins Brailler and SMART Brailler play.

**Wednesday:** Tactile maths concepts

The program incorporates a variety of mathematical concepts such as matching 2D and 3D and tactile shapes, sorting, counting and grouping like objects, puzzles, water temperature, time and clocks, measurement using tactile rulers, making comparisons of different size shapes and tactile graphics activities.

**Thursday:** Spatial concepts

The development of sound spatial knowledge and concepts are essential to students with vision impairment. Students can play games such as Simon Says to develop body awareness, directionality and crossing of the mid line. While looking at tactile maps, students use their knowledge of the points of the compass (N, S, E, and W) to navigate around continents, countries and find capital cities. *Moving on to pages* by Lois Harrell is a program that emphasises the building of a solid foundation for learning by touch. This is through different activities to develop and refine scanning skills to quickly trace, locate, identify, match, count, and compare simple patterns and characters in a logical format. All these concepts form the foundations for successful navigation around a braille page and book as well as links to Orientation and Mobility and looking at braille around the school.

**Friday:** Literacy activities

Sense Sacks are used to reinforce the skills covered during the week. For example, *Possum Magic* gives students the opportunity to use their four senses, touching puppets and toys, exploring tactile maps, hearing the CD of original author reading the story, smelling and tasting Anzac biscuits. Students are actively involved in conversations about the story and encouraged to ask meaningful questions to reinforce their conceptual knowledge. Students create their own tracking stories using known fairy tales based on ideas in *Fingerprints* by Gayle Lamb e.g. *Three Little Pigs* and *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. These tracking activities are meaningful as the students begin to recognise characters as they become familiar with the story and children begin to predict and ‘read’.

**Braille Butterflies: Early braille literacy learning**

Students are now at an early braille literacy stage of the Braille Butterflies program. We use the Braille for Infants Braille Reading Scheme developed by Royal National Instituted for Blind People (RNIB) to develop a cohesive reading, writing and spelling program for our students. Students have the opportunity to read whole words and books after learning just a few letters. The Braille for Infants series introduces letters in the following order: **a, m, g, b, t, l, s, I, c, h, e, p, d, y, u, n, f, o, w, x, k, v, r, j, q, z.** Students learn to recognise the letter and memorise its associated wordsign. Simple punctuation such as capital indicator, full stop, numerical indicator, and question mark are introduced early on. Two letter shortforms such as **little, good, said, could, would**, are introduced as soon as the student has learnt the necessary letters. Wordsigns **the, and, for** are also learnt. Students are taught how to read and write numerals, which is important when looking for particular page numbers, writing the date and recording answers in mathematics.

Once students can confidently read and write using letters, wordsigns and simple punctuation, they begin the South Australian School for Vision Impaired Spelling Rules for Braille and Print Readers. They are introduced to two letter consonant blends including the contractions **ed, in, en, st.** Followed by the consonant digraphs **th, sh, ch, wh**, and their contractions and **ck, ph**. Students have a strong foundation for reading, spelling and writing and are now able to access many age appropriate texts.

**Braille Butterflies: Fluent readers**

Students who use large print and those who use braille work with each other on a range of literacy learning activities. *Reading with Phonics – Phonics in Context*, by Sharon Shepherd, published by R.I.C. is a textbook which is clearly set out and requires very little adaptation for low vision students. The stories and activities have been transcribed into braille and students are exposed to contractions within the context of fictional stories and associated spelling activities. Once all contractions have been introduced, we move our focus to the letter-by-letter spelling of words. Students will have the opportunity to write words letter for letter when they are using a QWERTY keyboard on computers with screen reading programs.

For more information about the Ozzie Dots series of books, please contact the Statewide Vision Resource Centre <http://svrc.vic.edu.au/educational-programs/ozzie-dots/>

For more information about South Australian School for Vision Impaired, visit our website <http://www.sasvi.sa.edu.au/>

Or contact

Sharon Rattray

Deputy Principal, SASVI

[sharon.rattray98@schools.sa.edu.au](mailto:sharon.rattray98@schools.sa.edu.au)

Skye Jones

Highly Accomplished Teacher, SASVI

[skye.jones207@schools.sa.edu.au](mailto:Skye.jones207@schools.sa.edu.au)