

Incorporating Fast ForWord Reading into a Speech and Language Practice

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Reading research has repeatedly pointed to the importance of a broad range of language skills as critical to reading success.¹ These skills include those, which are commonly addressed through speech and language therapy with young children, and include: phonology, semantics, syntax, metalinguistics, and auditory working memory. However, many children with mild speech and language difficulties, children who speak English as a second language, and children with central auditory processing disorders are not identified or do not qualify for speech language intervention through our public school systems. These children, as well as children with more significant language impairment, have up to a 75% chance of developing significant reading problems during the school years.² Since many of these children with reading difficulties may never have been identified as eligible for speech-language services, a school may attempt to remediate the reading difficulties by employing a new reading curriculum rather than addressing the core language and memory skills that underlie the difficulty. To this purpose, the Fast ForWord family of programs were developed as intensive, neuroscience-based programs for enhancing the core perceptual, language and memory skills that serve as pre-requisites for reading attainment.

Fast ForWord Reading, the newest addition to these intensive training programs, is designed as a third step toward reading achievement. Fast ForWord Language (formerly Fast ForWord), the original program, has been shown in independent research on over 1,700 children to result in an average of one to two years gain in the reading pre-requisites of auditory processing, working memory and language, with up to a standard deviation improvement in basic reading skills. In addition, children who have trained with Fast ForWord Language to Reading (formerly Step 4word) have shown up to an additional year's growth in language skills and further significant improvement in decoding and passage comprehension skills.

There are two groups of children for whom Fast ForWord Reading may be appropriate.

- **Children who have not previously been identified or do not currently qualify for speech-language intervention but who have a mild language, word recall, or memory limitation that has interfered with reading comprehension, fluency, or spelling.** These children are candidates for Fast ForWord Reading as a stand-alone program.
- **Children who have received one or both of the Fast ForWord language programs but who continue to fall below**

grade level expectations in reading. These children are candidates for Fast ForWord Reading as a second or third level program after completion of the earlier language-based Fast ForWord programs.

The first group of children, those without significant language or auditory processing disorders, might not need the intensive auditory processing and language intervention of the Fast ForWord Language program nor would they necessarily need the additional decoding skills provided in Fast ForWord Language to Reading. However, these children would benefit from the intensive language-based reading instruction provided with Fast ForWord Reading. Because the same neuroscience/language science team that developed the earlier programs developed Fast ForWord Reading, this program is based on the same rigorous research and has the same scientific integrity. In Fast ForWord Reading, however, the child works directly on reading skills necessary for academic achievement rather than building auditory processing and perceptual skills first. Unlike Fast ForWord Language, the child does not progress through levels of acoustically modified speech on each task; since the program is designed for children whose processing skills are not significantly impaired. For the speech-language pathologist, then, children who might be identified as candidates for Fast ForWord Reading as a stand-alone program would be:

- Children with previously unidentified or corrected language deficits who exhibit problems with reading comprehension, spelling, or reading fluency but not necessarily reading decoding.
- Children who have received speech and language therapy in the past, no longer require these direct services, and do not seem to exhibit the auditory temporal processing deficits that underlie many language disorders.
- Children who are learning English as a second language and have mastered the oral language skills and dialects well in both languages, but who continue to exhibit reading difficulties.

The second group of children for whom Fast ForWord Reading would be appropriate are those children who have received Fast ForWord Language and Fast ForWord Language to Reading but who continue to fall below grade level expectations in reading. Many children with moderate to severe speech and language difficulties continue to fall below grade level in reading and spelling despite improvement in underlying language skills. For these children, the third-grade level reading and spelling mastery exercises in Fast ForWord Reading allow a child to make a final leap toward the reading skills assessed by standardized national tests and deemed essential for academic success in the upper elementary grades. The speech and language professional can provide a wonderful service to his or her clients by implementing the Fast ForWord

Reading program after completion of the original training programs. Children currently seen for speech-language intervention who are candidates for Fast ForWord Reading following an earlier administration of Fast ForWord Language or Fast ForWord Language to Reading would be:

- Children who have shown language gains with the earlier programs but continue to fall below grade level in passage comprehension, reading fluency, decoding, or spelling.
- Children who have shown language and/or auditory processing gains with the earlier programs but who did not reach completion or mastery on two or more of the Fast ForWord training exercises and continue to struggle academically.
- Children who have shown language and/or auditory processing gains on the earlier programs but for whom reading is slow and homework remains extremely time consuming despite near grade level achievement.
- Children who have shown language and/or auditory processing gains on the earlier programs but continue to experience auditory working memory limitations that affect passage comprehension.

Speech and language professionals who would like to learn more about Fast ForWord Reading should call Scientific Learning.

¹ Snow, C., Burns, M.S., and Griffin, P (EDS) (1998) *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

² Aram, D.M. and Hall, N.E.: (1989) Longitudinal follow-up of children with preschool communication disorders: Treatment implications. *School Psychology Review* 18(4):487-501.