

Extended article from blog post: [A Special Needs Child Meets PAL](#)

Meet Stacia W., RN, now a homeschooling mom of three. With the hope of encouraging others, she readily shares her experiences and insights about teaching her daughter, a child with Down syndrome (DS). "No one has ever said that teaching a special needs child is easy. It takes more time, effort, and patience than teaching a typical child. However, having the proper tools and guide enables you to apply your efforts to actually working with your child instead of preparing for it. That is what *Primary Arts of Language* (PAL) provides."

"Audrey began physical and occupational therapy when she was three months old. She started speech therapy at six months old. Her occupational therapist has seen more improvement in her handwriting since using PAL than during any other time in her life ... The key is to integrate [students'] therapy goals into daily life. Thirty minutes a week with a therapist will not bring about the changes that daily correction and application will."

How does PAL specifically meet the learning needs of her third-grade daughter?

There are two specific types of delays that DS and other special needs children experience.

Physical delays- Special needs children often have both gross- and fine-motor skill delays. This affects the process of handwriting and may also cause a speech delay.

Mental delays- Children may have processing issues, low IQ, or memory problems.

"These children also have a shorter attention span, need more repetition, and must be taught to do things that other children naturally do. Everything takes more steps. They can learn, read and write, but it takes more time." PAL implements learning styles that address physical and mental delays.

What specifically are the features of PAL that help these children find success? The following are some of Stacia's insights and experiences:

1. "PAL teaches the proper way to sit and hold a pencil. If a parent doesn't know these things, PAL gives the correct instructions."
2. "PAL is very much a **multi-sensory** program. You have the visual and hands-on, such as the file folder games. You have the **repetition** that they need."
3. How does PAL help **develop fine-motor skills**? "The file folder games work on pincer grasp when they pick up the small game pieces. The worksheets provide cutting practice, coloring, and handwriting."
4. How does PAL **improve speech**?

While you are reading, PAL is working with speech like speech therapists do. You are making sure they are saying the sounds correctly. The word game and reading practice works to ensure the beginning or final consonant sounds aren't dropped when speaking. Reading sentences encourages longer sentences to be spoken and correct use of articles (*a, an, the*) and other small words ... that they may usually drop. For example, Audrey may typically say "ball down there" when she needs to say, "The blue ball went down the hill," or something similar. Also, the preposition file folder game helps teach directional words such as *behind, on, under, and within*.

5. The *PAL: Reading Program* uses **controlled vocabulary**.

You have all the same words in all the parts. Children aren't being overwhelmed by words they don't know. A typical child can apply a rule to another word easily—*cat* and *hat*. Audrey can't do that. Every word is a new word to her. I have to make her sound things out. If it's not a word she knows, she will just guess. If you have a book with ten new words on every page, you aren't going to get through the book.

However, she can read the readers in PAL! She knows most of the words in the card game. Now we are going back and working with them again. I split the cards by sound and have dividers in the index card holder. We go through a few groupings every day—*er, ir, ur*; then, visit the farm and visit that particular section.

6. "We use the **copy work** sentences for reading as well. Unlike other subjects where I have to sit with her and assist with most of the work, Audrey can do the **PAL worksheets** independently. That brings me to another plus of PAL. The worksheets can be printed as many times as you want. Audrey did all of the cut-and-paste pages twice last year."

7. What about the **poetry component** of PAL? "Whether she speaks them or not, we learned a long time ago that what she can say does not always correspond with what she knows. People underestimate her a lot because of her speech delay. I think that all the things poetry helps another child with, those help her as well."

8. Why is **All About Spelling** special?

The lessons are short and go along with what you are doing in PAL. I love the magnets because you are using lower case letters. If you go to the store and get magnets, they are generally upper case. With other programs, the color doesn't necessarily mean anything. With *All About Spelling* you have the visual input. The colors of the tiles have a purpose. It's not just a rainbow of letters ... Abstract concepts are difficult for a child like Audrey.

9. PAL can address **select subject areas**.

Reading and writing are separate. Looking at other programs, I wonder how you could progress. If fine-motor skills are delayed, you can look, but you may not be able to write it. On the other side of the coin, with cognitive delays, you may spend a long time understanding a concept, but you can copy whatever. With Audrey, I have to look at every skill individually. It could be one little piece that is the part that she can't do. Because it's split, it's much easier. Reading, writing, spelling. You can move ahead in the portion that is not the problem.

10. "For children who are aware, there is no grade level associated with [PAL]."

When I started with IEW, using TWSS, I could not imagine Audrey ever able to do composition type writing. Then it hit me after listening to Andrew Pudewa. If she was ever going to do that, [PAL] is the program that would work. It gives you what to write. I can read the sentence, help her pick out the words, and then help her write the sentence. If she had to come up with information on her own, that wouldn't happen.

Stacia summed up the interview with one more astute observation: "Patience is the big key. Our daughter was almost three when she learned to walk. These children are delayed in every other thing. We can't expect them to learn to read at five years old."