

cycles approach to speech therapy

Cycles approach to speech therapy is a highly effective, evidence-based methodology designed to help individuals with severe phonological disorders. This approach focuses on facilitating the acquisition of more complex sound patterns through repeated practice within specific time frames. Rather than targeting single phonemes in isolation, the cycles approach emphasizes the naturalistic learning of phonological processes, aiming to improve a child's overall intelligibility. This comprehensive guide will delve into the core principles, phases, session structure, benefits, and practical applications of the cycles approach, offering valuable insights for parents, educators, and speech-language pathologists. We will explore how this systematic yet flexible framework can significantly impact a child's speech development and communication abilities.

Understanding the Cycles Approach to Speech Therapy

The cycles approach, developed by Bonnie Holly, is a structured yet flexible intervention model specifically tailored for children exhibiting severe phonological impairments. Unlike traditional articulation therapy that often targets individual speech sounds, this method focuses on improving a child's phonological system by targeting patterns of sound errors. The fundamental belief is that children with phonological disorders learn to produce target sounds and patterns by being repeatedly exposed to them in a structured, encouraging environment. The cycles approach is not about drilling specific sounds until mastery but rather about re-organizing a child's phonological system to move towards more adult-like sound patterns. It's a process that acknowledges that mastery isn't the immediate goal; rather, facilitating the child's innate capacity to learn and generalize sound patterns is paramount.

This therapy model is particularly beneficial for children who have multiple phonological processes impacting their speech intelligibility. These processes are common simplifications children use as they learn to speak, such as dropping final consonants or reducing consonant clusters. When these processes persist beyond a typical age or are excessively used, they can significantly hinder communication. The cycles approach provides a systematic way to address these patterns, ensuring that a child receives sufficient exposure and practice with each target process before moving on. The emphasis is on the process of learning, not just the mastery of individual sounds, making it a highly effective intervention for complex speech sound disorders.

Key Principles of the Cycles Approach

Several core principles underpin the effectiveness of the cycles approach to speech therapy. These foundational elements guide the therapist in planning and delivering interventions, ensuring a child's developmental needs are met comprehensively. Understanding these principles is crucial for appreciating why this approach is so successful in treating severe phonological disorders.

Facilitating Acquisition, Not Demanding Mastery

One of the most significant principles is the focus on facilitating the acquisition of target phonological patterns rather than demanding immediate mastery. The cycles approach recognizes that speech sound development is a gradual process. Instead of expecting a child to produce a sound perfectly in all contexts, the goal is to activate the child's awareness of the target sound and its role within the phonological system. This reduces pressure on the child and encourages more engagement and less frustration. Repeated exposure and practice within a cycle are key to this facilitation, allowing the child to gradually internalize the correct sound patterns.

Stimulating the Production of Target Patterns

The approach emphasizes stimulating the production of target patterns within each session. This is achieved through a variety of engaging activities and techniques designed to elicit the target sound or pattern. The therapist acts as a facilitator, providing ample opportunities for the child to attempt the target sound. This stimulation is provided in a supportive and encouraging environment, where approximations are celebrated and reinforced. The idea is to give the child the chance to "try" the sound or pattern, even if it's not perfect, because each attempt is a learning opportunity.

Providing Auditory and Kinesthetic Input

Crucial to the cycles approach is the provision of rich auditory and kinesthetic input. Children are exposed to clear, correct models of the target sound or pattern. Therapists use various techniques, such as tactile cues, visual aids, and verbal descriptions, to help the child understand how to produce the sound. This multi-sensory approach aids in developing the child's awareness of the target sound and how it is produced. The therapist's own speech serves as a primary model, but supplemental methods are used to ensure the child receives a comprehensive understanding of the target.

Recruiting Existing Knowledge

The cycles approach leverages the child's existing phonological knowledge and abilities. Therapists identify what sounds or patterns the child can produce and build upon that foundation. By targeting patterns that are currently emerging or are closely related to the child's existing sound system, the therapist can facilitate generalization and learning more effectively. This principle acknowledges that children don't learn sounds in isolation but rather as part of a system, and intervention should reflect this interconnectedness.

Focusing on Multiple Targets Within a Cycle

Instead of focusing on just one or two sounds at a time, the cycles approach targets multiple phonological processes within a single cycle. This reflects the reality of phonological disorders, where several patterns often coexist. By cycling through different target patterns, the child receives varied practice, which can be more efficient and beneficial for re-organizing the entire phonological system. This broad-spectrum approach helps address the overall intelligibility issue rather than just isolated sound errors.

The Structure of the Cycles Approach

The cycles approach is structured into distinct phases, each with a specific purpose in guiding the child towards improved phonological patterns. This systematic progression ensures that all relevant aspects of the target patterns are addressed over time. The organization of sessions and the progression through targets are key to the method's success.

Phase 1: Primary Target Patterns

This initial phase focuses on addressing the most pervasive phonological processes that significantly impact intelligibility. These might include processes like:

- Stopping of fricatives (e.g., saying "pat" for "cat")
- Fronting of velars (e.g., saying "tat" for "cat")
- Final consonant deletion (e.g., saying "ca" for "cat")
- Cluster reduction (e.g., saying "pay" for "play")

The goal is to introduce and stimulate these patterns until they begin to emerge consistently in the child's speech. Each target pattern is addressed for a specific duration within a cycle before moving to the next.

Phase 2: Secondary Target Patterns

Once the primary target patterns show signs of emerging, the therapy progresses to secondary target patterns. These are typically less impactful on intelligibility but are still important for developing a more complete phonological system. Examples might include:

- De-voicing of initial voiced consonants (e.g., saying "pie" for "bye")
- Syllable-initial /r/ and liquid gliding (e.g., saying "wabbit" for "rabbit")
- Vowel changes and other less common phonological processes.

The progression to secondary targets allows for a comprehensive approach to the child's phonological needs.

Phase 3: Tertiary Target Patterns (Less Common)

In some cases, especially with very young children or those with highly complex needs, tertiary targets might be addressed. These can include more subtle phonological patterns or those that emerge later in development. The primary focus remains on the most impactful patterns, but tertiary targets can be incorporated to refine the child's phonetic inventory and further improve intelligibility.

and naturalness of speech.

Typical Session Structure in Cycles Therapy

A typical session using the cycles approach is carefully structured to maximize engagement and learning. Each component serves a specific function in facilitating the child's acquisition of target phonological patterns. Therapists tailor these components to the child's age, interests, and specific needs.

Review of Previous Session

The session often begins with a brief review of the previous session's targets and activities. This helps to reinforce learning and provide continuity. This might involve asking the child to recall target words or engaging in a brief game related to the previous session's sounds.

Auditory Bombardment

This is a critical component where the child is exposed to a list of words containing the target phoneme or phonological pattern through amplified listening, often while engaged in a motivating activity. The child doesn't have to produce the sound, just listen to it embedded in words and short phrases. This is a passive yet powerful way to build auditory awareness of the target sound.

Target Word Production

This segment involves actively practicing the target phonological pattern. The therapist selects 3-5 target words that begin with or contain the target sound in the desired context. These words are presented through various methods:

- **Word cards:** Visual aids of the target words.
- **Objects:** Using toys or actual objects that represent the target words.
- **Storytelling:** Incorporating target words into a simple narrative.
- **Games:** Playing games where the target words are used.

The therapist provides immediate, specific feedback on the child's attempts, reinforcing correct productions and gently guiding approximations. Modeling the target sound is a key part of this process, ensuring the child receives clear phonetic input.

Stimulatory Techniques

Various techniques are employed to elicit the target sound or pattern. These can include:

- **Tactile cues:** Using touch to guide the child's articulators (e.g., touching the lips for /p/, /b/, /m/).
- **Visual cues:** Using mirrors or diagrams to show the mouth position.
- **Verbal cues:** Describing how to make the sound (e.g., "put your lips together tightly").
- **Metaphors:** Using descriptive language (e.g., "make a buzzing bee sound" for /z/).

The goal is to provide enough support for the child to attempt the sound, even if it's not perfect.

Probe for Targeté Word Productions

Towards the end of the session, the therapist probes for target word productions again. This involves presenting a few new words containing the target phoneme or pattern, without direct modeling or cues. The purpose is to assess if the child has begun to spontaneously produce the target pattern. This helps the therapist gauge progress and decide on the next steps.

Home Practice Assignment

Parents or caregivers are given a simple, structured activity to practice at home. This usually involves the target words or the auditory bombardment list. This home practice component is vital for reinforcing the learning that occurs during the therapy session and for increasing the child's overall exposure to the target patterns.

Auditory Closure

The session concludes with another period of auditory bombardment. This reinforces the target sound or pattern and provides a positive, listening-focused ending. It serves to solidify the auditory learning that has occurred throughout the session.

Identifying Target Phonological Patterns

The selection of target phonological patterns is a crucial step in the cycles approach. Therapists meticulously assess a child's speech to identify the most significant patterns that impede intelligibility. This assessment process guides the entire intervention plan.

Comprehensive Phonological Assessment

A thorough assessment is the first step. This typically involves standardized tests designed to evaluate a child's phonological system, as well as informal observation and analysis of spontaneous speech. The assessment aims to identify:

- **Phonological Processes:** Systematic sound errors such as final consonant deletion, cluster reduction, fronting, stopping, gliding, etc.
- **Phoneme Inventory:** The sounds the child can and cannot produce.
- **Syllable Structures:** The types of syllables the child can produce (e.g., CV, CVC, CCVC).
- **Intelligibility:** How understandable the child's speech is to familiar and unfamiliar listeners.

The therapist analyzes the results to identify patterns that occur with high frequency and significantly impact intelligibility.

Prioritizing Targets Based on Impact

The cycles approach prioritizes targets based on their impact on the child's overall intelligibility. Patterns that occur in a high percentage of opportunities and affect a large number of sounds are targeted first. For example, final consonant deletion, which can render many words unintelligible, is often a primary target. The therapist considers both the frequency of the pattern and its contribution to the child's communication difficulties.

Considering the Child's Strengths

While prioritizing challenges, therapists also consider the child's existing strengths. Targeting sounds that are stimutable or are phonetically similar to the child's existing sounds can facilitate learning. This principle of recruiting existing knowledge helps to build upon the child's current abilities, making the intervention more efficient.

The Role of Stimulability

Stimulability, or the ability to produce a sound in a specific context with cues, plays a role in target selection. While not the sole factor, targeting stimutable sounds can sometimes lead to quicker progress. However, the cycles approach is designed to be effective even with non-stimutable targets, as it focuses on facilitating acquisition through repeated exposure.

Benefits of the Cycles Approach

The cycles approach offers numerous advantages for children with phonological disorders. Its systematic, yet flexible nature, and its focus on naturalistic learning contribute to its widespread

effectiveness.

Improved Intelligibility

The most significant benefit is the marked improvement in speech intelligibility. By addressing patterns of sound errors, the child's speech becomes easier to understand, leading to improved social interactions and academic performance.

Development of a Functional Phonological System

This approach helps children develop a more organized and functional phonological system. They learn to use sounds and sound patterns in a way that is closer to typical speech development, leading to more natural-sounding speech.

Increased Child Engagement and Motivation

The playful, encouraging, and less demanding nature of the cycles approach often leads to higher child engagement and motivation. Celebrating approximations and focusing on gradual progress rather than immediate perfection reduces anxiety and fosters a positive learning environment.

Efficiency in Addressing Multiple Errors

By cycling through multiple target patterns, the approach efficiently addresses the complex nature of phonological disorders. Children with severe impairments often present with multiple co-occurring processes, and this method provides a comprehensive way to tackle them.

Facilitates Generalization

The repeated exposure and systematic practice within the cycles approach help children generalize the target phonological patterns to new words and contexts. This ensures that the learned patterns are not just limited to the therapy setting.

Evidence-Based Practice

The cycles approach is supported by a significant body of research demonstrating its effectiveness in treating phonological disorders. This evidence base provides confidence in its efficacy for speech-language pathologists and parents.

Who Can Benefit from the Cycles Approach?

The cycles approach is primarily designed for children exhibiting severe to profound phonological

disorders. However, its principles can be adapted for a broader range of speech sound issues. The key characteristic of a candidate for this therapy is the presence of multiple, significant phonological processes that impair overall speech intelligibility.

Children with Severe Phonological Impairments

This is the core population for the cycles approach. Children who have many phonological processes operating at high frequency and whose speech is largely unintelligible are ideal candidates. These children may have difficulty producing a wide range of sounds correctly and often have simplified syllable structures.

Children with Multiple Phonological Processes

If a child exhibits several phonological processes simultaneously, such as final consonant deletion, cluster reduction, and fronting, the cycles approach is highly effective. It systematically targets these co-occurring patterns, leading to more holistic improvement.

Children with Low Intelligibility

When a child's speech is difficult for even familiar listeners to understand, intervention targeting the underlying phonological patterns is crucial. The cycles approach directly addresses the factors contributing to low intelligibility.

Children Who Have Not Responded to Traditional Articulation Therapy

Some children do not make significant progress with traditional articulation therapy, which focuses on individual sound mastery. These children often have underlying phonological system deficits that require a pattern-based approach like the cycles method.

Early Intervention Candidates

While often used with older children, the cycles approach can be adapted for younger children who are demonstrating significant phonological errors, provided they have reached a certain developmental stage where such patterns are expected to be resolving.

The effectiveness of the cycles approach lies in its ability to systematically and gently guide a child's phonological development, empowering them with clearer and more understandable speech. The focus on process, stimulation, and a child-centered environment makes it a powerful tool in the speech-language pathologist's arsenal.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the core philosophy behind the cycles approach to speech therapy?

The core philosophy of the cycles approach is to facilitate phonological development in children with severe phonological impairments by providing highly repetitive, systematic, and experiential practice of target phonological patterns. It prioritizes intelligibility and aims to help children acquire the underlying phonological rules rather than just memorizing correct pronunciations.

Who is the cycles approach typically recommended for?

The cycles approach is most effective for children with severe to profound phonological impairments, meaning they exhibit multiple, widespread phonological processes that significantly impact their intelligibility. It's generally used for preschool-aged children, but can be adapted for older children with persistent phonological delays.

What are the key components of a 'cycle' in this therapy approach?

A cycle consists of approximately 3-6 sessions where specific target phonological patterns are practiced. Each session within a cycle involves auditory bombardment, phonetic/phonemic placement, practice of the target sound, and a take-home activity. The therapist then moves to a new target pattern for the next cycle, revisiting previous patterns later.

How does auditory bombardment work within the cycles approach?

Auditory bombardment involves the child listening to words containing the target sound or pattern. This is often done through amplification (e.g., headphones) and the therapist reading a list of words, drawing attention to the target sound by emphasizing it and using a slightly louder voice. The goal is to raise the child's auditory awareness of the target.

What is the role of 'phonetic placement' in the cycles approach?

Phonetic placement involves guiding the child to produce the target sound correctly by explaining and demonstrating the correct tongue, lip, and jaw placement. This can involve verbal descriptions, tactile cues, or visual aids. The aim is to provide the child with a clear motor plan for the sound.

How are target phonological patterns selected and sequenced in the cycles approach?

Target patterns are selected based on their impact on intelligibility and their stimulability. Patterns that are absent or significantly suppressed are prioritized. The sequencing generally follows a developmental hierarchy, starting with more basic patterns (e.g., final consonant deletion, gliding)

and progressing to more complex ones (e.g., cluster reduction, metaphonological processes).

What is the typical duration of a therapy session and a full cycles intervention?

Therapy sessions are typically 30-60 minutes, depending on the child's age and attention span. A full cycles intervention can last for several months, as it may take multiple cycles to see significant and consistent change in a child's phonological system. Progress is monitored by reassessing the child's phonological skills.

What is the evidence supporting the effectiveness of the cycles approach?

Research generally supports the cycles approach as an effective intervention for children with severe phonological impairments. Studies have shown improvements in intelligibility, phonological awareness, and the reduction of targeted phonological processes. Its systematic and repetitive nature is believed to contribute to its success.

How does the cycles approach differ from other phonological therapy approaches?

Unlike approaches that focus on eliminating specific processes or teaching sounds in isolation, the cycles approach emphasizes the acquisition of phonological patterns. It is less drill-based and more play-based, with a focus on auditory input and experiential learning. It also involves a planned rotation of target patterns across cycles, rather than focusing on one pattern until mastered.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to a cycles approach to speech therapy, each starting with "" and followed by a short description:

- 1. Implementing the Cycles Approach for Childhood Apraxia of Speech. This foundational text provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical underpinnings and practical application of the Cycles Approach. It details the systematic progression through phonological patterns, emphasizing gradual emergence of target sounds. Clinicians will find evidence-based strategies for assessment, goal setting, and treatment planning tailored to children with apraxia of speech. The book offers practical tips for session structure and parent involvement to maximize treatment effectiveness.*
- 2. The Cycles Approach in Action: A Clinician's Guide. This practical guide serves as a roadmap for speech-language pathologists looking to integrate the Cycles Approach into their practice. It breaks down the core components of the therapy model into manageable steps, offering clear instructions and examples. The book addresses common challenges faced by clinicians and provides solutions for adapting the approach to diverse client needs. Readers will gain confidence in structuring sessions, selecting appropriate targets, and monitoring progress.*
- 3. Mastering the Cycles Approach: Advanced Techniques and Considerations. Moving beyond the basics, this book delves into advanced strategies for utilizing the Cycles Approach, particularly for*

more complex caseloads. It explores modifications for older children, co-occurring language impairments, and treatment for phonological processes that are particularly resistant to change. The authors discuss how to effectively integrate the Cycles Approach with other therapeutic techniques for a more holistic intervention. Case studies illustrate the application of these advanced concepts in real-world clinical scenarios.

4. *Cycles for Pronunciation: A Practical Framework.* This resource focuses on the practical application of the Cycles Approach specifically for improving pronunciation in children with phonological disorders. It provides clear guidance on identifying target phonemes and patterns, structuring drill activities, and incorporating auditory bombardment effectively. The book emphasizes the cyclical nature of exposure and practice, allowing children to gradually master new sound patterns. It's designed to be a hands-on tool for clinicians seeking to implement this evidence-based approach.

5. *Early Intervention with the Cycles Approach: Supporting Young Children.* This book specifically addresses the application of the Cycles Approach within early intervention settings for toddlers and preschoolers. It highlights how to adapt the principles of the Cycles Approach for very young learners, focusing on play-based activities and caregiver collaboration. The text emphasizes the importance of early identification and intervention for phonological impairments. Strategies for engaging parents and fostering carryover in the home environment are a central theme.

6. *The Cycles Approach and Speech Intelligibility: Bridging the Gap.* This title centers on how the Cycles Approach directly impacts a child's speech intelligibility. It explores the theoretical connection between mastering phonological patterns and improved clarity of speech. The book offers strategies for measuring intelligibility and demonstrating progress achieved through the Cycles Approach. Clinicians will learn how to articulate the benefits of this method in terms of functional communication outcomes.

7. *Cycles in Practice: Case Studies and Clinical Vignettes.* This collection of case studies provides rich examples of the Cycles Approach in action across a variety of child speech sound disorders. Each vignette details the assessment process, target selection, session structure, and progress made by individual children. The book offers insights into how to adapt the Cycles Approach to different phonological patterns and client characteristics. It serves as a valuable learning tool for understanding the nuances of implementation.

8. *The Cycles Approach for Bilingual Children: Adapting Therapy.* This important resource addresses the unique considerations when applying the Cycles Approach to bilingual children with speech sound disorders. It discusses how to assess phonological patterns in both languages and adapt treatment targets accordingly. The book provides guidance on navigating language transfer and interference within the framework of the Cycles Approach. Clinicians will find strategies for culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate intervention.

9. *Building Phonological Awareness with the Cycles Approach.* This book explores the synergistic relationship between the Cycles Approach and the development of phonological awareness skills. It details how the structured, pattern-based nature of the Cycles Approach can inherently foster phonological awareness. The text offers practical activities and strategies that integrate sound awareness and manipulation within therapy sessions. Clinicians will learn how to leverage the Cycles Approach to build a strong foundation for literacy.

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