

Struggling Readers Need to ‘Learn to Look’

**Focus on teaching children how to see and use visual information.
Ways to create text and make learning to ‘look at print’ more powerful
are shared.**

Subject Area: **Struggling Readers / Writers**

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We all have those students who struggle with reading and writing. Try as we might, we often, as teachers, have tried all the ‘tricks in our bag’ and they are still struggling. For whatever reason, fluent reading eludes them and their spelling is barely discernable. Identify the missing ingredient to make looking-at-print and creating-written-text more productive for your students.

These user-friendly handouts provide strategies to put into practice immediately in your classrooms! Theory supports the strategies, but use these handouts to make this a ‘go forth and do likewise’ session. Get a fresh perspective on a reoccurring challenge.

About the presenter:

Jacquie Hurwitz has taught Reading Recovery at St. Timothy School since 1999. She kicked off a series of parent support presentations provided by Home and School with Supporting Alternative Learners. Since receiving her Master’s Degree, brain research has become her hobby as she explores the whys and wherefores of these fascinating, albeit challenging learners. Her day is balanced with Reading Enrichment groups from 1st through 3rd grades as they explore how words work in both reading and writing. Her research extends to alternative methods of exploring math and ‘learning how to learn’ sequentially, interacting with students K-8.

For more information, check out her web pages through St. Timothy School at www.cdeducation.org/schools/ti/page40.html, following the Link to Classrooms then to Reading Recovery, or email her at Teachtolook@aol.com.

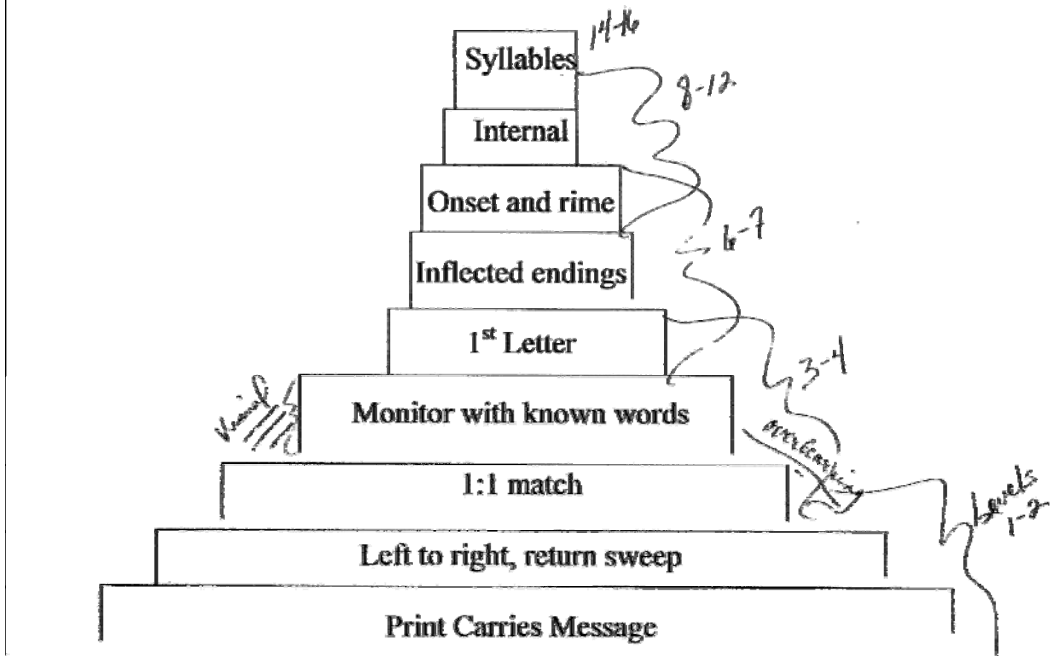
“People who know what they need to know and seek that out –
That’s learning to learn!”

Carol Lyons, The Developing Mind: The Role of Attention and Movement, 2002

Build a strong foundation for looking at print. Each step is essential and must be incorporated unconsciously before another level can be added. Reading and writing both require sequential processing. Some readers need to learn to look sequentially! That ability reciprocates in writing.

Book levels are approximated. One to one match and monitoring with known words are keys to creating visual acuity. Note the ‘overlearning’

Pyramid for looking at print...building a proper foundation



Important hint! When you get to the syllable level, incorporate all three modes of learning. Clap the parts as you say the word. Help the child hear the parts. They can even hold their chin to feel the parts if they have trouble hearing them. (Their mouth will open with each syllable.) They need to hear it, feel it, clap it before they can see it. This works even with older readers! It is fun as well as productive. Let's face it, we construct words in parts as well as decode in parts. This is an incredibly effective tool – use it!

Did you ever notice that each syllable has a vowel?

Have your students look for that pattern through discovery.

Another important hint! Have fun!

“Emotion affects cognitive mental functions such as memory, attention, and perception.”

Lane, Nadel, Allen, & Kaszniak, 2000

“Emotion...drives attention, which drives learning and memory.”

Greenberg & Snell, 1997

‘ If they're not laughing, they're not learning.’ This may be an overstatement, but research supports the concept.

“Thus, emotion and cognition function as partners in the mind.” LeDoux, 1996

Looking at print involves finding the patterns and distinguishing the salient points. Letter or word sorts are highly valuable since it requires the student to focus in on visual discrimination of print.

It's all about learning to look!

Sorts can be as creative as the students. Let them choose the sort and then justify their groupings.

Eg. All the letters with ‘around’ first, all the words with short vowels, all the words by spelling patterns, all the words with three letter blends, words by number of syllables or ‘chunks’, all the words that break the rules!

You get the idea.

The point is they need to look at print more specifically and discover how words work.

That’s the key – help them discover how words work!

Then help them make mental pictures of the patterns. Visualization is the key to their success.

The case for ‘learning to look’...

“There is no certain code for spelling in English – most of the time, if two words are spelled similarly, they are pronounced similarly (LONE, PHONE, BONE, TONE, CONE, ZONE, SHONE STONE, SCONE), but there are almost always exceptions (ONE, DONE, NONE). In Spanish, if two words rhyme, they are spelled similarly, and if two words are spelled similarly, they sound alike, but in English, on average, that is only true slightly more than half the time, and in some extreme instances, the orthography is so deep, the exceptions are in the majority (**TOUGH, PLOUGH, THROUGH, THOUGH, COUGH, THOUGHT**).”

<http://www.sedl.org/reading/topics/phonicrules.html>

“Cognitive scientists have shown beyond doubt that fluent, accurate decoding is a hallmark of skilled reading...Automatic word recognition, which is dependent on phonic knowledge, allows the reader to attend to meaning; likewise, slow, belabored decoding overloads short-term memory and impedes comprehension.

While this renewed interest in phonics is certainly a welcome development, **we will make limited progress unless decoding instruction is grounded in what we know about the stage of reading development, the structure of the English language, and the strategies student employ to learn it.** With rare exception, classroom practice is not informed by these principles. As we shall see, problems abound not only with the approaches to decoding typically found in whole-language and “literature-based” programs but also with programs associated with traditional phonics...

The learner progresses from global to analytic processing, from approximate to specific linking of sound and symbol, and from context-driven to print-driven reading as proficiency is acquired. The instruction we deliver should be compatible with the emerging competence of the student.”

Moats, Louisa C., Teaching Decoding, American Educator, Spring/Summer 1998

“Patterns

Are the key to intelligence.

Patterning information really means

Organizing and associating new information with

Previously developed mental hooks.”

Your Child’s Growing Mind, Jane Healy

Mental patterns are built on networks of sensory connections.

Emotion is the basis on which memory is organized. Short-term memory is primarily an **electrical activity** and long term memory involves a predominantly **chemical process**.

A high proportion of all learning takes place at the **subconscious level**.

Learning is experience. Everything else is just information.

Albert Einstein

The difference between novices and experts in a field appears to be that experts tend – because of a great deal of experience in a field – to organize information into much larger chunks, while novices work with isolated bits of information.

Benjamin Bloom

See a pattern here?

On spelling...

“Dew knot trussed your spell chequer two fined awl your mistakes.”

This should have gotten your attention. Now, let’s think how words look...

“Children who can spell inventively, or give a good phonetic spelling for a word using preconventional strategies, are signaling that they are ready to learn standard spelling. Next, children need to learn the patterns of print in a logical order. Uncommon or unpredictable words that are commonly used (they, do, said, were, etc.) **should be practiced correctly from the beginning**, using a *multisensory* drill of saying and writing simultaneously. Words that follow a pattern should be **grouped and sorted, compared to others, discussed**, and written to dictation until learned. Very poor spellers should practice only a few words at a time to avoid memory overload.

Invention is not the mother of spelling. Rather, it is a beginning first step in kindergarten and first grade that reflects children’s emerging awareness of phonology. **Beyond that first step are many others that children are unlikely to take with reliable success if left on their own. Directly teaching to children the structure of the writing system is one of our most important responsibilities. In it lies the gift of words.”**

Moats, Louis Invention Is Not The Mother Of Spelling. The Network Exchange, Fall/Winter 1996/97

We must help the students to create visual images of words, both regular and irregular. Creating this visual sense – this orthography or ‘what words look like’ – is a missing ingredient in most reading and writing instruction. As our learners are all so varied in learning styles and developmental levels, so must our instruction be varied. Phonics instruction typically teaches rules and patterns – great as far as it goes. For those non-visual learners, we must teach them how to visualize and make word pictures in their head. **These word pictures not only become a fundamental strategy for taking on new words, but serves as a foundation for print – both written and read.**

At all grade levels, the visual aspects of print must be re-taught and reinforced. As spelling lists are posted, note the bolded guidelines above. Teach them how to learn the words! Model thinking! Let me model a dialogue that might accompany teaching the word *computer*.

“Computer – clapped, it has three parts. First part sounds like come (a word they know) and looks like it too. Middle part looks like it sounds. Last part uses a common ending.” This line of thinking uses rules, analogy and phonics. *Now – most important – check it!!!!* “Does it look

right? Make a picture in your head of that word and use it to check yourself when you write it. Knowing how to write that word will help you read it. Com-pu-ter. Are there any surprise letters?"

If you model **'how to learn'** each word, you will note dramatic improvement not only on test scores but decoding skills. For more challenging students, show them how to cut up the word and reassemble it – first part first, always. This stresses the chunking aspect of decoding and encoding as well as the sequential processing for both. It helps them see the smaller parts and build upon that foundation. What was it Bloom said? Novices use smaller chunks of information. Experts can process larger ones. Take them down to the smaller parts – they will build much faster and more effectively with a firm foundation of **how words work**.

Can you see how Word Walls enhance strategic thinking? I have seen first grade spelling tests given in whole sentences using sight words with one analogy word included. Students needed to use the Word Wall to solve the unknown word.

Eg. "I can see the *frog*. Frog works like dog (on the word wall). Say it slowly and think how it might be different. Think how it might be the same."

Teach strategic thinking.
How can they solve for a word besides,
"Ask three before me!?"

This poem is a particular favorite...Made me think!

The Spelling Test

Kaye Starbird

One morning in a spelling test
The teacher said to Hugh:
I have a word for you to spell.
The word is 'kangaroo.'"
But Hugh was puzzled by the word
Which wasn't one he knew,
So, when he wrote it on the board,
He printed "hannagrue."

"No, No! Go take your seat,"
The teacher said to Hugh,
"And take along this copy card.
The card says 'kangaroo,'
Then get your pencil out," she said,
"And get your notebook, too."

And write the word a hundred times
And tell me when you're through."

So Hugh did just exactly what
The teacher told him to,
And, when he handed in his work,
The teacher said to Hugh:
"I hope you know your spelling now."
And Hugh said, "Yes, I do,"
Then – walking bravely to the board –
He printed "kannagrue."

The key element to 'learning how-to-learn to look at print' is not in the repetition
but in how words work!

"*Kangaroo* – clap it – three parts; kang, like sang; a, sounds like short u; roo like in zoo (or Winnie the Pooh). Any surprise letters? Picture it in your head. Write it and check it!!! Are you right?"

That doesn't take long, does it? Makes a huge difference.

Subject: Are You Sure You Understand English?

We'll begin with a box, and the plural is boxes;
but the plural of ox became oxen not oxes.
One fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,
yet the plural of moose should never be meese.
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice;
yet the plural of house is houses, not hice.

If the plural of man is always called men,
why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?
If I spoke of my foot and show you my feet,
and I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,
why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?

Then one may be that, and three would be those,
yet hat in the plural would never be hose,
and the plural of cat is cats, not cose.
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,
but though we say mother, we never say methren.

Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
but imagine the feminine, she, shis and shim.

Some other reasons to be grateful if you grew up speaking English:

- 1) The bandage was wound around the wound.
- 2) The farm was used to produce produce.
- 3) The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
 - 4) We must polish the Polish furniture.
 - 5) He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- 6) The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- 7) Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- 8) At the Army base, a bass was painted on the head of a bass drum.
 - 9) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
 - 10) I did not object to the object.
 - 11) The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- 12) There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
 - 13) They were too close to the door to close it.
- 14) The buck does funny things when the does are present.
- 15) A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
- 16) To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
 - 17) The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
- 18) After a number of Novocain injections, my jaw got number.
 - 19) Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
 - 20) I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
- 21) How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?
- 22) I spent last evening evening out a pile of dirt.

Screwy pronunciations can mess up your mind! For example...

If you have a rough cough, climbing can be tough when going through the bough on a tree!

Let's face it - English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple.

English muffins weren't invented in England.

We take English for granted.

But if we explore its paradoxes, we find that quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

And why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham?

Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend?

If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid

of all but one of them, what do you call it?

If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught?

If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a
humanitarian eat?

Sometimes I think all the folks who grew up speaking
English should be committed to an asylum for the
verbally insane.

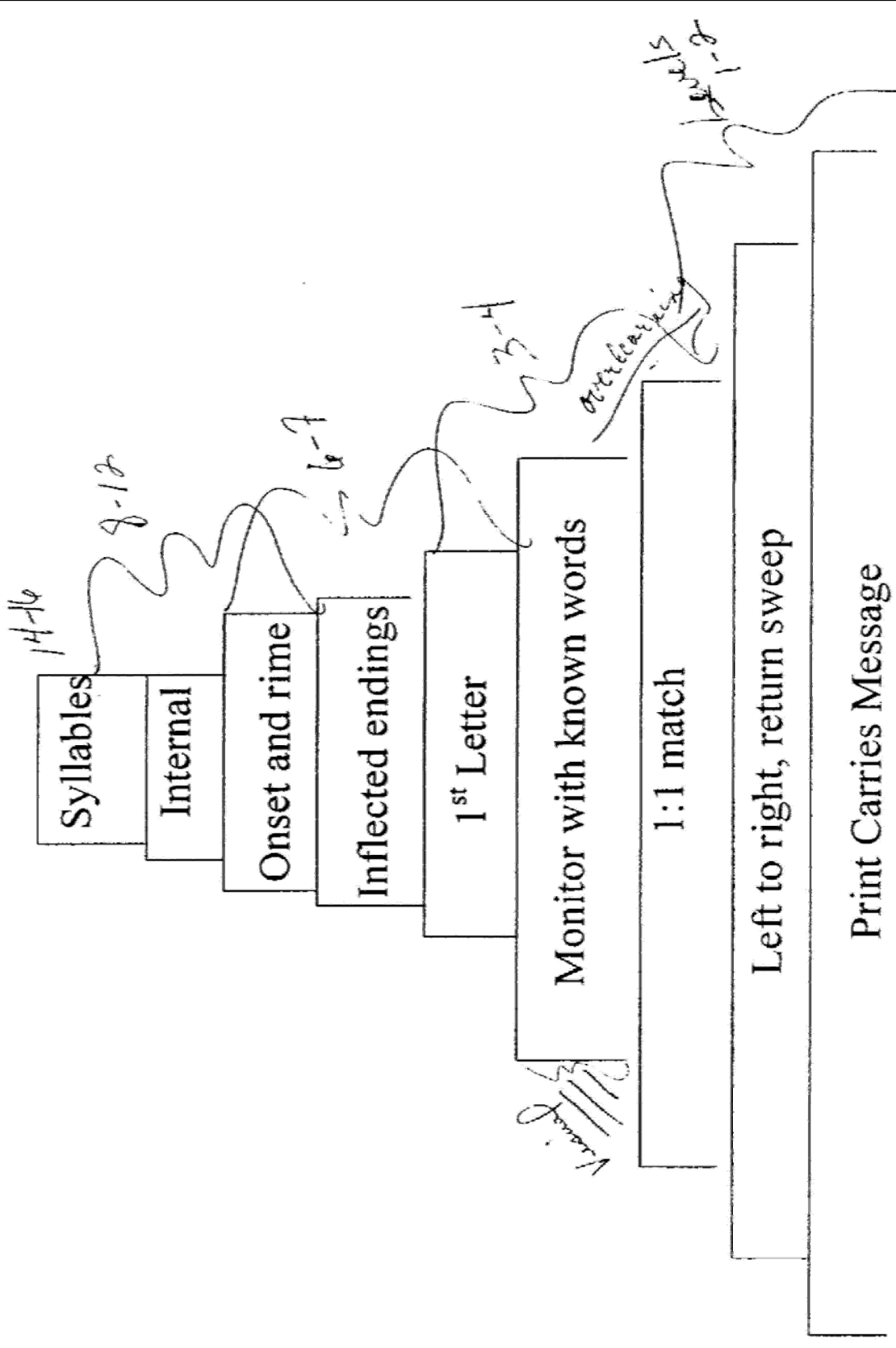
In what other language do people recite at a play and
play at a recital? Ship by truck and send cargo by ship?
Have noses that run and feet that smell? How can a
slim chance and a fat chance be the same,
while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a
language in which your house can burn up as it burns down,
in which you fill in a form by filling it out
and in which an alarm goes off by going on.

If Dad is Pop, how's come Mom isn't Mop?

AUTHOR UNKNOWN or is it KNOTKNOWN

Pyramid for looking at print...building a proper foundation



Aa (Long A) a ay (day) a_e (ate) ea (great) ai (nail) ei (their) e' (resume') ey (they) aigh eigh (eight) et (bouquet)	Bb b	Cc c ck (black) ch (school) qu (bouquet) que (clique) kh (khaki) Vowel before _ck is always short!	Dd d ed (fanned)	Ee (Long E) e (we) e_e (Pete) ee (see) ea (east) ei (receive) ie (Sophie) ey (Corey) _y (Molly)	Ff f ph (phone) gh (laugh)	Gg g gh (ghost) gue (rogue)
Hh h (how) wh (who)	Ii (Long I) i i_e (ice) ie (pie) ei ey _igh (high)	Jj j du ge (age) dge (judge) gi (giraffe) gy (gym) Vowel before _dge always short!	Kk k (kite) c (cool) _ck (Jack) qu que (chèque) kh (khaki)	Ll l (lip) _le (little) el (elephant)	Mm m _mb (lamb) mn em = /m/	Nn n kn (know) gn (gnaw) pn (pneumonia) mn (mnemonic) en=/n/
Oo (Long O) o (ocean) o_e (rote) oa_ (oat) _ow (row) ou ough (dough) oe (hoe) eau (beau)	Pp p	Qq qu kw ku or cu = /q/ Q never walks without best friend U!	Rr r rh (rhyme) wr_ (write)	Ss s ps (psychology) sc (science) st ce (celery) ci (city) cy (cyberspace)	Tt t pt (receipt) ed (looked) bt (doubt)	Uu (Long U) u (unicorn) u_e (use) ue (blue) ui (suit) eu (pneumonia) _ew (new)
Vv v	Ww w u o (as in one)	Xx _x (ax) ks ex = /x/ x = /x/ Vowel before x usually short	Yy y _y_ (eye)	Zz z _s (as / is) x (xylophone)	Short U u (up) ou (trouble) a (pizza) e i o y	

Just a taste of the spelling patterns and visual exceptions that serve as the flexible foundation for our English language. Check out educator, Marva Collins, and her daily patterned chant to complement this list. Make your own large classroom cards to serve as reference tools for older readers. Tune them into visually checking. 'Does that look right?' *Jacquie Hurwitz / St. Timothy School / Cols., OH*