



How do children learn to read?

Every child is an individual, therefore every child will learn in his/her own individual way. Some children are generally visual learners, some are auditory learners and a few are kinesthetic learners. Some children learn well in all three modalities but others need specific teaching to their strengths.

The successful reading program, effective for every child in the class, will have these three strands:

Systematic Explicit Phonics - the bottom-up approach

Many children need to have lessons in a systematic sequential phonics program. Phonics provides the skills needed to decode unfamiliar words and to spell. The letter sounds and the blending of these sounds are a necessary part of the reading process, as is the encoding of sounds in spelling. Children with visual learning disabilities or visual processing problems need to be taught by this method in order to learn to read, but the understanding of phonics is necessary for all students.

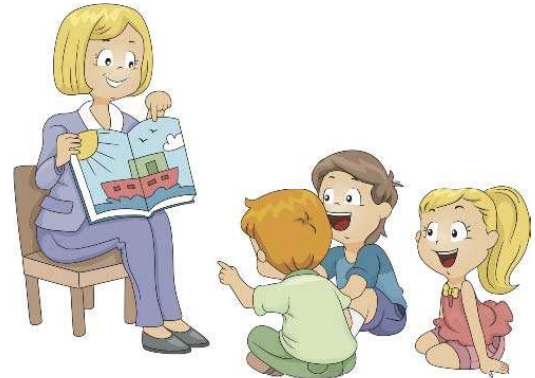
Explicit Sight Word Teaching - the direct approach

The direct approach is the specific teaching and repetition of sight words in a sequential program. This is especially necessary in the early part of the learning process. Many children require up to 50 repetitions of a word in order to remember it and this is especially necessary for children with auditory problems who find phonics difficult or impossible to

learn. Some children learn words easily, but others do not learn words without specific teaching. Every child needs to memorize the words because, in order to read with fluency, children need to have instantaneous recall of every word. Many of the words in our language cannot be decoded phonetically and these words must be memorized. Most children in your class will be visual learners so this is an important part of a good reading program.

Literature - the top-down approach

This method adds many benefits to the reading process. Children need to appreciate good literature and be exposed to well written trade books. They should be encouraged to read these books independently and discuss them. This method places greater emphasis on comprehension. In this method the students begin to read by memorizing little books or by using picture cues.



Children need to read independently every day to practice the skills they have been taught and to listen to good literature being read to them each day. Guided reading lessons may teach good reading habits but does not directly teach decoding and encoding skills.

Children learn to read in different ways. Many children are able to learn no matter what method is taught, but there are also many children who can only learn through their strongest learning modality. Some children are visual learners, some are auditory and some kinesthetic learners. The sight word and literature strands are the most useful for the visual learners. Auditory learners do best when taught a strong phonics program. Too often, however, we forget the kinesthetic learners, and there are more children who learn this way than is realized. A good reading program should include body movements, forming words by printing, and other kinesthetic exercises throughout the three strands.

In Grade One and Grade Two the three strands need to be taught separately, but they will begin to overlap and converge as the children begin to read. The phonics and sight word strands will greatly improve the reading in the literature strand. As each child is learning to read, the teacher can observe whether the student is a visual learner who achieves the reading skills best through sight reading, an auditory learner who learns best through phonics, or a kinesthetic learner who requires physical action to learn to read. Students with learning disabilities will especially benefit when taught toward their strongest modality. There are some students who can only learn with one method, and it is interesting and rewarding to see these children bloom when they are taught to their strengths.

It isn't easy! Teaching reading IS brain surgery.....