

PEOPLE LEARN DIFFERENTLY - METHODOLOGY

A beginning reader must develop the ability to recognize meaning in lines of print. The goal is for the reader to become unconcerned with the particular mechanics of reading and instead to focus on grasping the ideas conveyed by a group of words. A contextual approach to reading, such as **whole language**, is considered a top-down method. One reads to get meaning and for communication.

Reading is also the ability to decode, or break down, written words and to recognize words by **sight**. This approach is considered a bottom-up method. The theory is that people can learn to read by decoding or breaking down, unfamiliar words through the use of **phonics** and **structural analysis**. Another method is the “look-say”, or sight word (**vocabulary development**) approach, in which the student memorizes words.

Vocabulary Development

In order to read fluently, the reader must recognize certain sight words instantly. Some words have to be taught by sight because they do not have regular spelling patterns, and/or they are important words that must often be recognized in isolation. However, sight words can also be taught in the context of reading. Examples of sight words are sign words and number words.

Phonic Analysis

Phonics teaching is based on the alphabetic principle in the English language that letters and sounds are associated. In practice, the student identifies words by their sounds. Although the sound-symbol relationship, between the sound and a letter of the alphabet, is sometimes one-to-one, this is not always the case. For example, the letter *c* can have either a *k* sound or an *s* sound.

Since written symbols are codes for spoken language, phonics helps the reader decode, or master, the coding system. Phonics is not a method but a skill used to read unfamiliar words. The student must be able to discern one sound from another. In addition, she must develop associations between sounds and their written symbols and spelling patterns.

Because beginning adult readers often have poor auditory discrimination, phonics is very important. Yet, if phonic skills are taught in isolation, adults are often bored because they cannot see the relevance to meaning. This curriculum’s approach is that phonic skill development is a useful strategy that should be introduced in meaningful context. One approach is for the teacher to use the student’s language experience stories as a base for phonic skill development, combining meaning with skill building. Students need not learn the names of phonic patterns (such as consonant digraphs) or memorize generalizations.

Structural Analysis

Structural analysis, like phonics, is a decoding strategy. It is based on the principle of chunking, or breaking words down into chunks rather than single letters and sounds.

Structural analysis includes graphemes, syllables, compound words, contractions, prefixes and suffixes.

Like phonics, structural analysis is another valuable tool in decoding because words are broken up into spelling patterns that are frequently regular. For example, prefixes and suffixes are syllables. If these patterns are learned, they can be used to break down words.

Whole Language

Whole language is a philosophy rather than a specific methodology. Proponents of whole language stress that the purpose of reading is comprehension. The student is an active participant in the process and learns to read by activating his prior knowledge and relating it to new knowledge.

Reading is seen as a natural event and is learned holistically. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are all integrated and taught in meaningful context. The student interacts naturally with the environment in this approach. For example, he is encouraged to look for print in the environment and is shown how this relates to his life.

Language experience stories are a major part of whole language. These are stories that the beginning student dictates to the teacher, who writes them down. The student then reads the story and thus learns by using his own material. Examples of such stories would be talking about a job or a hobby. These stories are more motivating and interesting to the student because he has produced them.

SUMMARY

Throughout the years, educators have put varying degrees of emphasis on these different methods. No one knows exactly how a person learns to read, or why some people learn using a certain method when others do not. What is known is that people learn to read in different ways, and what works for one may not benefit another. No one method of learning to read will be successful for everyone. However, if one approach has not worked for the adult learner in the past, other methods may be tried. As an example, a hearing-impaired person may not benefit from a phonic approach but may do very well with whole language or sight word recognition.

In learning, we are all comfortable with starting with the familiar; find out what the student already is familiar with and work from this starting point. The student needs to be empowered and take ownership of her own learning experience with the teacher guiding the student toward self-direction.

Additionally, the student needs sufficient practice in actual reading. Writing is also an essential component in the learning process and should be integrated into the classroom instruction every day, no matter what method is used.

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH ADULT BEGINNING READERS

- **ESTABLISH POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS**

There is a strong emotional component working within the adult beginning reader. Adults entering a beginning reading program often have negative memories of past classroom experiences. Many adults have developed low self-esteem from earlier experiences at school and sometimes believe from the outset that they will not succeed at reading.

Adults learn best when they feel that the teacher is caring and that the teacher believes they will succeed. One of the teacher's most important tasks is to reassure students that they can become readers.

- **EXPECT SUCCESS**

At the end of each lesson, the student should feel that he has succeeded at something new. For example, the student can learn his own name as a sight word at the very first lesson. Not only will he then *own* this learning, but also the teacher can tell the student that he is already reading.

The student needs a great deal of positive, frequent feedback. He should leave each class feeling that he has accomplished something and is a competent, successful student. Review some of the words that the student has learned that day so that he can see that he has made real progress.

- **CREATE A STUDENT-FRIENDLY CLASSROOM**

The classroom environment is extremely important. Adults do not want to be treated as children, and the teacher should keep in mind that the student is an adult. The adult may not have learned to read, but she is frequently extremely successful in other areas of life and deserves respect.

A traditional classroom atmosphere can discourage adults because they often recall that they have failed in just such a setting. A very formal classroom may have a negative effect.

- **A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT**

The student should be treated as a responsible, intelligent person who is in charge of his learning. Reading should be a collaborative effort, with the student gradually assuming more and more responsibility for self-direction.

The teacher is a co-partner in learning who helps the student to develop strategies which will enable him to read. The classroom should be student-centered and self-paced to the

greatest extent possible. Rather than following a strict, prescriptive routine, the teacher should make use of the information gathered during the initial assessment in planning for lessons and considering students' needs on an individual basis.

- **READING IS SOCIAL**

Reading has a social aspect that should not be overlooked. Every effort should be made to adapt class activities to include the minimal reader. Everyone in the class should be able to participate fully without the risk of being embarrassed.

Friendliness and respect among the teacher, student, and classmates help create a warm atmosphere. The teacher should avoid criticism and ridicule at all costs, because success so heavily depends upon establishing a positive environment. Errors should be viewed as learning opportunities by teacher and student alike, and the student should be able to take a risk without fear.

- **ADULT STUDENTS**

Many of the techniques used in teaching children are ineffective for adults because adults are not only developmentally different but bring a wealth of life experiences into the classroom. They want to read meaningful text.

Adults also process information differently from children. They need adequate thinking time. Instruction needs to be presented in small increments with plenty of time for repetition and practice.

The student should not be asked to read aloud what she has not had the opportunity to read silently. During oral reading, the teacher should be ready to prompt, but give the reader enough thinking time.

Colloquial pronunciation of words should be accepted. Many proper names, for example, have varying pronunciations; the teacher might point that out. The teacher should also stress that in reading, an unpronounceable word can still be a recognizable word; *Disraeli* may be hard to say, but each time the reader sees the word, she recognizes the character.

- **SET GOALS FOR READING**

Unless an adult student is compelled to attend an adult education class, he probably has a specific reason for being there. Many students join learning programs in response to a personal need. They usually do not want to learn to read for its own sake, but because a situation now requires it. For example, a child might need help with homework or the student has made a job change. Reading is then a vehicle for coping with a life change. The teacher should first establish what brought the student into the program and use this information to plan lessons and activities.

The student will do best if he has some control over his learning and is an active participant to the fullest extent possible. Early in the program, the teacher and student

together should establish goals. Sometimes goals are very specific. At other times, the student may have only vague, general ideas about why he wants to read. The teacher must then broaden his awareness about the purpose of written communication, showing him how reading can be used to help him function more fully personally and within society.

- **CLARIFY GOALS**

The teacher can help the student clarify his goals and together discuss ways of accomplishing them. Long-term goals, such as becoming a proficient reader or obtaining a GED, may seem overwhelming at first. However, the teacher can also help the student develop short-term goals to establish a feeling of accomplishment as soon as possible. For this reason, goals should be broken down into smaller objectives, and the teacher should be careful not to make the instruction too fast-paced.

At the beginning of each lesson, the teacher should discuss what will be done that day to establish with the student the daily objectives. Toward the end of the session, the teacher should do a short review to help emphasize what learning took place and to summarize.

For instance, at each session certain objectives can be established: the student will read and write one sentence; learn three sight words, etc. At the end of the session, the teacher can point out how well the student reached the objective and succeeded. Besides specific feedback at every session, review of previously written and read material such as the reader's language experience stories can be effective in showing the student just how much progress she has achieved.

- **OUTCOME-BASED INSTRUCTION**

Goals should focus on outcome-based instruction. That is, learning should be performance centered, and learning experiences should be organized around competency-developed categories (Knowles, 1980). The student and teacher determine goals together, and goal-related material should be used for reading instruction. If, for example, the student wants to read self-help literature, then this can be at least one of the vehicles of instruction.

- **SELECT MEANINGFUL MATERIAL**

Teachers often indicate it is difficult to find relevant reading material for beginning adult readers. A list of companies that sell beginning reading materials is provided in the *Resource* section, with toll free telephone numbers and websites to order catalogs.

The teacher might also consider frequently overlooked, but easily accessible, material that can be of practical use to the student. These are simply the real-world materials so relevant to daily life. Common meaningful, real-life materials include: job manuals, income tax forms, classified ads, newspapers, magazines, repair manuals, medicine bottles, thermometers, food labels, driver's license manuals, work invoices, maps, children's literature books, calendars, handouts from self-help groups, menus, health pamphlets, cookbooks, mail, signs and bumper stickers. Many of these can be used to teach sight

words. A good strategy is for the teacher to ask the student to bring in materials that he wants to read. Another is to encourage the student to look for and notice environmental print outside the classroom.

The teacher should try to collect every magazine and book possible to give to the student. Let the student take them home for as long as he wants them - even permanently. The student is now a reader and needs to possess printed material.

- **LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE STORIES**

Language experience stories that the student has dictated to the teacher are also extremely relevant and interesting to the student because he has personally produced them. All these materials should be read first for meaning. The teacher may then select certain words to teach as sight vocabulary, for phonic analysis, or for structural analysis.

- **RELATE READING TO MEANING**

Quite often non- readers or very low-level readers have not made a connection about the purpose of reading in life. Many adults have managed to compensate in other ways for reading deficiencies and have come from environments where reading is not a priority.

The student may want to read for a specific purpose, such as understanding a job manual, but may not realize how reading can otherwise be important. After all, she has already become an adult without this ability. The teacher can help the student become aware of the function of literacy in the outside world and broaden her horizons. The student needs to realize the relevance of reading and how it can help her communicate.

From the beginning, the teacher should guide the student into the realization that speaking, listening, reading, and writing are related. Adult beginning readers often perceive reading as a decoding process. To them, reading is a process of sounding out words or identifying their individual meanings rather than a meaning-making process (Keefe & Meyer, 1980). Other adults are poor at auditory discrimination and do not realize the association between sounds and their written symbols. Still other readers can read the words in a sentence but not comprehend it.

- **EMPOWER THE READER**

The teacher should take an active role and guide the student towards self-direction by explaining the process of reading as much as necessary. The teacher should build on the strengths of the student and present reading and writing as enjoyable activities. The teacher should also explain why certain strategies are being used, and how they help the student accomplish his goals.

The teacher can explain how phonic and word structure activities help the student to break down unfamiliar words, for instance. The teacher can help the student develop auditory discrimination skills with illustrations and practice in selectively attending to sound patterns. Rhyming, thinking of words with the same beginning or ending sounds, and discriminating between similar words are good activities.

- **DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS**

Schemata:

An important strategy in developing comprehension is to combine schemata, or the student's prior knowledge about a subject, with new information from the printed matter to get meaning. Schemata are internal structures, somewhat like mental maps, that include knowledge, ideas, and concepts about the subject. Discuss with the student her prior knowledge that is relevant to the new material to be read; this will enhance comprehension.

Give Examples:

The teacher can help prepare the student by demonstrating concrete examples of how the teacher gets meaning from a passage. The teacher can give examples from personal experience, explaining what she does to activate prior knowledge and how she uses various strategies to increase comprehension. This includes discussion about what the student already knows and conversation among the students about the topic to be read.

Activities, such as the above, reinforce the connection between oral and written language and set the stage for reading. Another technique is to ask students to make predictions about the passage, often using titles and illustrations as guides, and to preview what is to be read. Another strategy is to introduce a few new words before reading, making certain that the student knows what they mean.

Metacognition:

Metacognitive strategies have to do with thought processes. Metacognition is knowing what is known already, knowing when understanding of new material has been achieved, knowing how the understanding occurred, and knowing why something is or is not known (Guthrie, 1983).

During reading, metacognition takes place when a student realizes he understood or did not understand the material. Good readers employ self-monitoring skills and develop different strategies to comprehend. For example, they might reread a difficult sentence or use the context of a sentence to guess an unfamiliar word.

Poor readers sometimes can read a passage but do not understand what they read. The teacher can help the student to develop metacognitive strategies by modeling reading and doing the following: discussing what was read ("What was this about? Who were the main characters?"); asking open-ended questions about the material ("Why do you think he did that?"); encouraging the student to self-question ("What did I understand?"); and asking questions about sequencing, cause and effect, main ideas, and details of the passage. The teacher should also model correct reading by reading aloud and demonstrating the rhythm of reading, as well as reinforcing the context.

Comprehension Strategies:

After the passage is read, useful strategies for comprehension include retelling and summarizing the passage, discussing and evaluating what was read. Writing a summary of what was read also reinforces the reading-writing connection.

- **EMPHASIZE WRITING**

Integrating Reading and Writing

Engaging students in the variety of experiences provided when reading and writing instruction are combined leads to a higher level of thinking than when either process is taught alone (McGinley and Tierney, 1989). Students need to write every day and relate it to reading. In writing, spelling and punctuation errors should be de-emphasized.

Students can be given assignments to complete on days they will not be attending class. For example, simple journal entries, writing affirmations and newspaper vocabulary word hunts (save old newspaper to provide paper for students).

Write to Communicate

The purpose of writing is to communicate and to express oneself. At this level, the teacher should encourage meaningful writing activities without having the student worry about mechanical mistakes. Dictation can be a useful technique because it encourages sound discrimination as well as practice in writing.

The teacher should incorporate the student in class writing activities as a reader/listener. More advanced students who write essays can read their draft (providing a copy to the beginning reader). The listening students could then participate in a class discussion of the essay.

- **USE ADAPTATIONS AS NEEDED**

Many adult students have problems with eye coordination. When the student is reading, she should use any props or techniques which make the eye connection easier. For example, she should be able to trace the word with a pencil, follow the print with her finger or an index card, or subvocalize as necessary.

A large-print adult dictionary is helpful for students. The teacher can encourage students to use a small mirror to see how the mouth shapes certain sounds. If a tape recorder is available, the students can read aloud their language experience stories and then listen to them.

- **UTILIZE MULTISENSORY AND MULTIMODALITY ACTIVITIES**

Multisensory activities are effective because students often learn better using one sense over another. Some benefit more from visual activities, some from auditory exercises, and others from touching. In cases like these, a variety of activities will be beneficial. Tracing on rough surfaces such as sand or sugar, writing in the air, touching lips when making sounds, and shaping letters with materials such as modeling clay, are all successful for many students. Also, many adults have trouble focusing for long stretches and should be able to move about when necessary.

- **ACHIEVE MASTERY WITH PRACTICE**

The student must have every chance to practice until mastery is achieved. There is no point in rushing through the curriculum if the student is left feeling frustrated. New material needs to be absorbed, and much of the class session should be spent practicing actual reading and writing.

The teacher should repeat and overteach. Adult reading students often have very little reinforcement outside the classroom. They will proceed at different rates, but mastery of the reading process will take time and much effort on the student's part.

SUMMARY

All adults can learn, and some strategies enhance learning. The adult is capable of self-direction and full participation in the learning process. The teacher can facilitate this by his confidence in the student; by establishing goals, methods of instruction and assessment mutually with the adult; by relating goals to student needs; and by creating a comfortable, positive environment for learning.

For additional strategies for working with adult beginning readers, see the following in the *Resource* section: *For Adult Learners... Remember...; Ideas for Working with Low Literacy Learners; Commonly Asked Questions about Learning Disabilities, Characteristics of Adults with Learning Disabilities (Reading) and Instructional Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities; Learning Styles, Learning Styles Checklist and Instruction for the Various Learning Styles.*

Prerequisites for Reading

If any of the following activities seem to confuse the student, explain how print flows. Model this until the student understands completely.

- Ask the student to point at words in sentences. Check to see if he is moving his finger from left to right.
- Ask the student to cut out words from a sentence and reassemble them in correct order.
- Ask the student to move her finger over the print from top to bottom. Observe the direction in which the finger moves.
- Ask the student to demonstrate the location of left starting points
- Choose readings with easily recognized starting words (I, The, etc.). Start with one-line sentences and captions under pictures.
- Ask the student to show you the front, back, top, and bottom of a book
- The student needs to know that the sequence in reading is letter, word, and sentence. Use a story that has a picture on the facing page. Ask questions:
 - “Where is the beginning of the story?”
 - “What is a letter?”
 - “What is a word?”
 - “Where is the first letter of a word?”
- See if the student can recognize upper and lower case letters and punctuation marks by asking him to point to *a small b*, *a period*, etc.
- Determine if the student knows what spaces are (some students think spaces are words)

General Method for Teaching Sight Words

1. Decide on 4-5 words to be covered.
2. Print these words in lower case letters on index cards, one word for each card.
3. Ask the student to dictate a sentence to you using each of these words. You write the sentence on the back of the card. Underline the word to be taught.
4. Show each word to the student. Say the word as he looks at it. Ask him to look at the word and repeat it. Read the sentence on the back of the card aloud. Ask him to read the sentence.
5. At the next lesson, review the words and sort into two piles: words he remembers and words not recognized immediately. Put the cards the student knows on a notebook ring.
6. Review the unknown words, one at a time. Tell the student the word. Have him look closely at it, noticing the shape and number of letters. Ask him to trace the word in the air or on the table.
7. Have the student say the word and ask how he would use it in a sentence.
8. Repeat with other words.
9. Mix new and old sight words and review often.
10. Add words learned to a notebook ring so that the student can see his own progress.

(Adapted from Hakanson & Gunderson, 1986)

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDENT ASSESSMENT MINIMAL LIST FOR READING LEVEL 0 - 3.9

a	call	fun	in	of
about	came	funny	is	off
after	can	game	it	oh
again	car	garden	jump	old
all	cat	gave	just	on
alone	catch	get	kitten	once
am	children	girl	know	one
an	coat	give	lamb	or
and	cold	glad	last	other
animal	color	go	laugh	our
any	come	goat	let	out
apple	could	gone	letter	over
are	cow	good	light	paint
around	cry	got	like	parade
as	dark	grass	little	park
ask	day	green	live	party
at	did	ground	long	peanuts
aunt	do	grow	look	penny
away	does	guess	lost	people
baby	dog	had	lunch	pet
back	doll	hand	made	picnic
bag	door	happy	make	picture
ball	down	hard	man	pig
barn	dress	has	many	play
basket	duck	hat	may	please
be	each	have	me	pocket
bear	eat	he	men	pony
bed	egg	head	met	pretty
bee	every	hear	milk	prize
before	far	heard	miss	pull
began	farm	hello	money	puppy
behind	fast	help	monkey	put
best	father	hen	more	rabbit
better	feet	her	morning	rain
big	find	here	mother	ran
bird	fine	high	much	read
black	fire	hill	must	ready
blue	first	him	my	red
boat	fish	his	name	ride
book	fit	hold	near	right
box	five	home	nest	road
boy	flew	honey	never	room
bring	flower	horse	new	run
brown	fly	hot	next	said
bus	for	house	night	sang
but	found	how	no	sat
buy	four	hurry	noise	saw
by	friend	I	nose	school
cake	frog	ice	not	see
calf	from	if	now	she

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDENT ASSESSMENT MINIMAL LIST FOR READING LEVEL 0 - 3.9

shoe	tree	that	white
show	trick	the	who
sing	truck	their	why
sit	try	them	will
sleep	turtle	then	window
snow	twin	there	wish
so	two	these	with
some	uncle	they	woman
soon	under	thing	word
spring	up	think	work
squirrel	us	this	would
stay	very	those	yard
step	wagon	three	year
stop	walk	time	yellow
store	want	to	yes
story	was	told	you
street	water	too	your
sun	way	took	zoo
surprise	we	town	
tail	went	toy	
take	were	train	
talk	wet		
tell	what		
than	when		
thank	where		

339 Total Words

SAFETY WORDS AND WORD SIGNS

Danger
Poison
Do Not Enter
Watch Your Step
No Trespassing
Fire Door
Radioactivity
Hospital
Men Working
Flammable
Keep Out
Warning
Keep Off
Fire Escape
No Admittance
Ambulance
No Admittance

Exit
Combustible
High Voltage
Caution
Stairs
Fire Alarm
Police
Doctor
On/Off
No Smoking
No Loitering
Hot-Cold
Beware
Fire Extinguisher
Fire Department
Dentist

SAFETY PICTURE SIGNS

Poison
No Entry (Keep Out)
No Smoking

Flammable
First Aid (Red Cross)
No Fires

PERSONAL WORDS

Name
Address
Telephone (Phone)
Date
Place of Employment

Birthdate
Social Security Number
Signature
Occupation
Maiden Name