



Whole word approach to reading

Why use a whole word approach to reading?

The use of phonics is emphasised in schools to teach early reading skills. Not all children, however, find this approach easy, and may find it difficult to master. Children who are primarily visual learners are likely to find the use of a whole word approach easier, rather than the use of a phonics approach, as an introduction to reading.

There is research that supports the use of a whole word approach to reading for some children who have learning difficulties, and this can provide a useful way to bridge the gap between sight reading and phonics.

Research has also shown that developing reading using a whole word approach can be 'a way in' to spoken language and support the emergence of a child's speech.

Using a whole word approach can support children's self-esteem as readers and learners as it can enable them to engage in reading activities that are meaningful, motivating and that look similar to the reading activities of their peers.

The whole word approach to reading

- Supports a child to begin to read by sight and build up a sight vocabulary
- It encourages recognition of words in relation to other words, and an understanding of their context
- It enables the child to develop an understanding of what a word means/represents
- Will involve giving the child frequent exposure to the written form of identified words, that can be paired to an image and/or a sound

Once a sight vocabulary is established (over 50 words), a phonics approach can support further development of reading skills and learning to read longer and more complex words.

Strategies:

- Play games to help develop visual memory and visual discrimination. For example:
 - matching pairs
 - Kim's game
 - What's different?
 - Making pattern sequences (e.g. build a tower of alternating red and blue bricks)
- Identify an initial core vocabulary of words that are meaningful to the child and understood. This can include:
 - The child's name- draw the child's attention to their name in written form on labels, etc; Write their name on a label to be attached to their work; help them to find their name card for registration, etc.
 - Family names
 - Nouns (e.g. farm animals, transport, food, furniture)
 - Verbs (e.g. run, jump, drink, eat, etc.)

Words are printed in lower case and may have a corresponding picture on back)

- Play games with flashcards. E.g.
 - Labelling animals on a toy farm

- Word action- lay the flashcards out on the floor and ask the child “can you jump to ‘pig’?”; “can you hop to ‘cow’?”
- Make a word scrapbook, with a word at the top of the page, and then pictures/photographs cut out and stuck in that match the word
- Role play- the child is the farmer and is asked to feed to animals as indicated on each flashcard; can you feed baby a ‘banana’; can you go to the shop and buy an ‘apple’
- ‘Go fish’- write words onto fish outlines and attach a paperclip to each fish. Attach a small magnet to a fishing line, and catch a word fish from the pond. What does it say?
- Make a split page book- such as “Who likes to eat?” The top half of the pages would have photographs of different people, with the phrase: ‘Sarah likes to eat...’ The bottom half of the pages have the words of identified food items from the vocabulary list
- Play matching pictures/photos games
 - Matching words by playing matching games- matching word to word/ word to picture
 - Select a word when spoken
 - ‘Name’ or read the word
 - Word lotto
- Reinforce with home-made books, topic books, labels within the classroom etc.
- Look at books together that contain short text in large print. Can you find the word ‘pig’ on the page?

Next steps

- Chose new words to introduce that are not yet comprehended by the child or used in their speech. Words chosen should enable the building of phrases and sentences for the child to practise
 - Use the new words in conversation with the child to help develop their understanding
 - Include the small connecting words, recognising these can be particularly difficult as many look similar
 - Make simple books based on the child's own experiences and write simple sentences to accompany the pictures/photos for the child to read
 - Using velcroed flashcards and strips or a sentence holder, encourage the child to sequence a sentence to match a picture/photograph- these can be the sentences presented in the books made
 - Use a multisensory approach to teaching new words- say the word loudly, quietly, like a robot; read the word on large sheets as well as smaller cards; trace the shape of the word using different tactile resources; devise an action to go with the word
- Introduce commercial reading books/ story books that contain meaningful vocabulary and words the child can recognise. It may be necessary to add your own simple sentences to the stories
- Check comprehension by asking simple questions about the story- for example, the child can be asked to find the flashcard with the word that is the correct answer
- Begin to target grammar and syntax such as prepositions
- Once the child has established a sight vocabulary of approximately 50 words begin to also work on phonics:
 - Initially link all phonic work to the child's known sight vocabulary
 - Identify letter-sound correspondences in words known to the child
 - First concentrate on initial letter sounds (e.g. sort words from the sight vocabulary into groups beginning with the same letter, etc.)
 - Then graduate to CVC words and simple blends

A number of approaches have been developed using the whole word approach to reading, including ‘See and Learn’ and ‘Reading, Language Intervention’.

January 2019