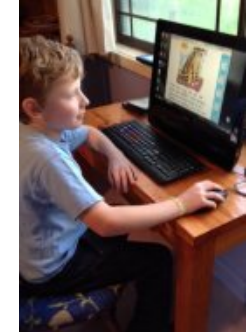




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Get Reading Right: A Synthetic Phonics Approach to Reading, Writing and Spelling.

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Reviewed by Kristin Anthian

Links

- Learning Difficulties Australia, www.ldaustralia.org.au
- SPELD Vic, www.speldvic.org.au
- SPELD NSW, www.speldnsw.org.au
- SPELD-SA, www.speld-sa.org.au
- Dyslexia SPELD Foundation, WA, www.dsf.net.au
- Read Australia, www.readaustralia.com
- Maureen Pollard, Little Learners Love Literacy program, www.learninglogic.com.au



Recent national and international reports into the early teaching of reading (UK Rose Review- “Independent Review of the Early Teaching of Reading”, 2005; US National Reading Panel – “Teaching Children to Read”, 2000; Australian Nelson Report by Rowe - “National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy”, 2005) advocate for a systematic, explicit, direct, phonics based instructional approach as part of a balanced literacy program in the early years. This balanced literacy program ought to also include phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary instruction. Similarly, John Hattie’s text “Visible Learning” (2008), which contains over 800 meta-analyses on the influences of achievement in school-aged students, also illustrates that phonics instruction has a significant effect size in learning outcomes for students, and his recent text “Visible Learning for Teachers” (2012) helps teachers ensure the evidence based practice of phonics instruction becomes a reality in schools. As such, phonics instruction constitutes part of best practice in the teaching of early reading. Additionally, the English component of the new Australian National Curriculum also states that Students at Foundation Standard “... *identify the letters of the English alphabet and use the sounds represented by most letters... They listen for rhyme, letter patterns and sounds in words.*” At year one standard students “... *when reading ... use knowledge of letters and sounds (and) high frequency sight words.... They listen for and reproduce letter patterns and clusters...*” Thus, highlighting that phonics instruction has a fundamental role to play in the development of early literacy skills.

- Christine Killey, phonics instructor and supplier of phonics teaching aids, www.learningmadeeasier.com.au
- Get Reading Right, www.getreadingright.com.au
- International Foundation for Effective Reading Instruction IFERI, www.iferi.org
- Phonics International, www.phonicsinternational.com
- Phonics Hero www.phonicshero.com

Get Reading Right (GRR) is one such approach that follows a systematic process of teaching the 44 phonemes (sounds) of the English Language and their corresponding graphemes (letters) through Synthetic Phonics. Synthetic Phonics, unlike analytic phonics, teaches groups of phonemes, and the graphemes that can represent those phonemes, in a systematic way. While there are currently no longitudinal studies on the efficacy of GRR, it is built on sound scientific principles regarding the nature of learning to read. GRR also offers webinars to instruct teachers in using their programs and synthetic phonics in general, and it is pleasing to hear the author's reference research into the teaching of reading, and how this theoretical knowledge shaped the development of their program.

Right from the onset students are taught how to blend sounds together and segment sounds apart to read, write and spell. GRR Synthetic Phonics does not use the three cueing system (Syntax, Semantics and Orthography) of whole language approaches that endorses the implementation of guessing words from the context in which they are written. This three cueing system can become problematic for students as they are required to decode more complex text. Students can struggle with multisyllabic words, reducing their accuracy and fluency, if they haven't learnt the full phonic code. This has a flow on effect to reading comprehension. In contrast, students using GRR learn how to decode and encode words by applying letter-sound knowledge through the whole word, not just using their visual skills with the initial grapheme and guessing the rest.

In the GRR program, students are initially introduced to the phonemes /s/ /m/ /c/ /t/ /g/ /p/ /a/ /o/, and their corresponding graphemes. This quick introduction of a group of phonemes results in students being able to blend and segment many consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words at a preparatory level. However, for the students I work with that have learning difficulties, I found the introduction of these requires a slower pace and overlearning. The program allows considerable flexibility and

differentiation, so that teachers can ensure that they pitch it at their various student's levels, including those that require extension or enrichment work and can begin blending four (CCVC) or five sounded words (CCVCC) (e.g, s-p-o-t-s).

Each set of phoneme-grapheme correspondence (PGC) is built on systematically, thus teachers learn how to teach students the full phonic code. Early years teachers are often skilful at teaching the initial phonic code consisting of one sound being represented by one consonant letter (e.g., /k/ represented by the letters 'c', 'k') and one sound being represented by two consonant letters (e.g., /k/ represented by 'ck' as in back or /sh/ as in shark). The challenge for teachers often lies in teaching the extended code, such as the multiple spelling variations for 'r' controlled vowel digraphs or trigraphs (e.g, such as /air/ being represented by 'air' as in chair, 'are' as in square, 'ear' as in pear and 'ere' as in there) or that /sh/ can also be represented by the letters 'ti' as in station or 'ci' as in machine. Similarly, students also need to learn that sometimes graphemes can represent more than one phoneme (e.g., the graphemes 'ow' can represent the phoneme /ow/ as in how or /oa/ as in tow.) Remembering and applying these accurately relies on a student's visual and auditory memory and in the second example word knowledge as well. GRR addresses these explicitly.

GRR has three teacher handbooks for instruction that include the basic phonic code, advanced phonic code and complete phonic code. Its program employs a multisensory approach to student learning, providing students with various methods of converting their knowledge to long term memory, aiding mastery through automaticity and accuracy. The "Synthetic Phonics Toolkit" includes detailed lesson plans that comprise of clear learning intentions to be presented to students; an opportunity for students and teachers to work through examples together; time for students to work on skills independently or in small groups; and the process is completed with a student review of learning and a reflection of outcomes that includes

explicit teacher feedback. The toolkit also includes word lists, games, guided reading instructions, assessment tools, copy masters and a technical vocabulary section to assist teachers to understand the specialist language associated with teaching synthetic phonics. The included CD rom contains other resources comprising of power point presentations for fast reading and writing to aid fluency; colour templates for games; large colour grapheme cards and much more. I particularly like the use of non-words in games such as 'trash and treasure', as students are only able to read these words by using their phoneme-grapheme correspondence knowledge. This is specifically useful in the identification of students who may be at risk of reading disorders related to their phonological processing.

The program also comprises of take home tasks to encourage the bridging between home and school learning, and a "Power Pack" for students who may be showing signs of reading/spelling difficulties. I have found the "Power Packs" particularly useful for the students I work with who have had difficulty learning the phonic code. The ready-made lists of 'camera words' (high frequency, irregular sight words) and decodable words, work in conjunction with the 'practice books', so that students gain early success and are rewarded to continue their efforts. The online internet software program "Phonics Hero" has been a great motivator for some of my reluctant learners and another avenue to keep students engaged in the complex task of learning to read, write and spell. I am impressed by the way that sounds can be easily manipulated within words, so that students continue to develop their phonemic awareness alongside their phonic skills.

The GRR program has a suggestive scope and sequence that teaches synthetic phonics from the preparatory year up to third term year five. However, for students who may be experiencing difficulties isolating and blending sounds in words, the program may be used effectively with an older cohort in the primary years, although I have found my older students

have wanted more sophisticated graphics or characters, particularly some of the young males I work with.

The GRR program includes fully decodable text at various levels, reducing the likelihood that students will employ guessing strategies. These books also include high frequency irregular sight words, which do not easily conform to phoneme-grapheme correspondence rules, or are phonic rules that students haven't learnt at this level of text. They also comprise a comprehension component that relies on strategy instruction, (such as activating background knowledge, questioning, inference, creating sensory images, determining importance and vocabulary knowledge) to assist students to connect to text and gain meaning from it. Students are not simply answering questions, but are encouraged to develop the techniques required to assist them to find and understand key information. These skills can then be transferred when reading other text.

As a registered consultant member of Learning Difficulties Australia, a professional presenter and a registered teacher with special education qualifications, I have found GRR resources and program highly effective for many of the complex and diverse learners I work with. My students have been engaged by the different ways they can learn using the program and I have been pleased with its flexibility in delivery, while being systematic and explicit. As with any Literacy package, teachers need to know their students by keeping accurate data and adapt the materials to their learning style and needs. However, GRR is a program definitely worth investigating.

For more information about Get Reading Right go to www.getreadingright.com.au

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Bibliography

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). *The Australian Curriculum: English*. Retrieved 25th October 2012 from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Curriculum/F-10>

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