

STUMBLE TRIP, STUMBLE TRIP

Every reader struggles at some stage, so when they falter, what can we do to help them back on their feet, asks Gill Budgell?

When thinking about how children learn to read, I'm reminded of Michael Rosen's *We're going on a Bear Hunt* and have taken a few liberties with the text.

*We're going on a book trip
We're going to read a big one
What a beautiful day!
We're not scared.
Uh-oh!
A book...
It's a big, thick, tricky book.
We can't go over it.
We can't go under it.
Oh no!
We've got to read through it.
Stumble, trip, stumble trip...*

For many children this is their fear; they hit a book along the rocky road of reading and they stumble, trip and struggle. They don't know that it's normal, that it can be a good thing and that it happens to all readers of all competencies, types and ages.

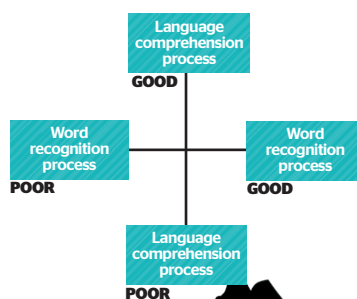
They don't know that sometimes it's OK to give up on a book and try it again another time, or that sometimes it's worth battling on because when you get to the end you feel an enormous sense of achievement and satisfaction. We do a disservice to learners if we view only those who seem to find the process or mechanics of reading difficult as 'strugglers'; although that is no way intended to trivialise those very real difficulties that often need specialist help.

So, I argue here that, just like 'errors', 'struggles' are to be welcomed and overcome; that fundamentally this is our job as teachers. We model good reading but we also model what to do when there's a problem. It's a life skill, just like going on a bear hunt!

What can make us trip up?

Let's return to The Simple View of Reading adopted by the Rose

Report, which, despite being a 'simple' view, can still serve as a useful model for understanding the critical elements of the reading process. We know there are two key axes as shown in the well-worn chart: language comprehension and word recognition processes.



This presents us with four quartiles, each of which includes a different combination and balance of skills. In its simplicity it helps us to understand the juxtaposition and

necessary balancing of these skills. In essence, it exemplifies the struggle between learning to read – the word recognition processes – and reading to learn; the language comprehension processes. It makes sense.

Learning to read

As we know, children must now learn to read by mastering the basic



principles of the alphabetic code and do so by blending letters and sounds to read and synthesising letters and sounds to spell. The current government is committed to the synthetic phonic approach to teaching reading and, along with a flurry of new and exciting resources, we've seen 'matched-funding' initiatives and a soon to be introduced Y1 Phonic Screening Check to ensure that no child slips through the net.

The Reading Reform Foundation (RRF), supported by the government, believe that this approach is right for all children and, apart from those with severe educational needs, it really is possible to teach all children to read. At a recent RRF conference, the phonics experts debunked some myths:

Myth 1

'Children who struggle to read need something different from phonics'

They need good visual memory and a good ear for hearing in order to blend well. If you can blend well then there is no limit to the number of words you can read.

Relying on memory is fine for the short term, but for long-term success you need to be able to crack the alphabetic code.

Identify strugglers after a few weeks and give them immediate extra help - not an alternative strategy. Do not mix methods. Just double the teaching using an approved 1:1 programme.

Failure is the result of insufficient blending practice and being moved on too quickly.

Myth 2

'A one-size fits all approach cannot work'

Learn to decode then comprehend - reading for meaning demands that you crack the code.

Those who 'get it' easily will still benefit longer term when they use their phonic knowledge for tackling unknown words and concepts.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gill was formerly a literacy consultant and primary class teacher. She is now a director of Frattempo which specialises in developing literacy resources.



Once you can decode you can read easily - those who read easily love reading.

Don't ever ask children to read books they can't read themselves, but do share books.

Myth 3

'We've always done phonics.'

We haven't 'done' phonics consistently and systematically. We haven't 'done' phonics synthetically. If we had, we would not have the current literacy rates.

Don't complicate it; just teach the code as quickly as possible to empower children to move on to independently enjoy the rich and varied world of language and books.

Reading to learn

So once children have mastered the mechanics of reading, usually during KS1, they are then skilled up ready and able to read independently and to use their new found skills for wider reading and learning. So what struggles may ensue here? If children have no difficulty with

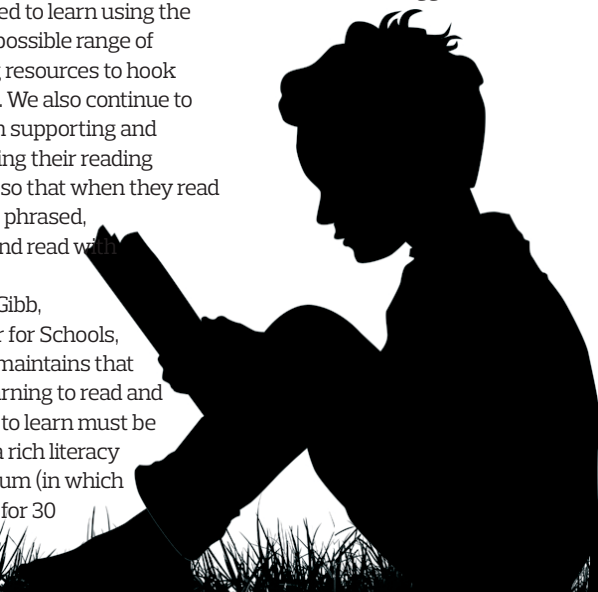
the word recognition processes then difficulties with language comprehension may be linked to socio-linguistic disabilities (e.g. autism spectrum), vocabulary weaknesses, generalised language learning disorders, and learning difficulties that affect abstract reasoning and logical thinking. But for most children there are struggles rather than disabilities and we continue to teach the skills and strategies they need to learn using the widest possible range of exciting resources to hook them in. We also continue to focus on supporting and enhancing their reading fluency so that when they read it is well phrased, paced and read with ease.

Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools, always maintains that both learning to read and reading to learn must be part of a rich literacy curriculum (in which reading for 30

minutes a day is essential) and must allow for early identification of those who need extra teaching and / or practice.

Types of reader and types of struggle

So, in theory, it's simple. But of course it isn't. And just as The Simple View of Reading is an oversimplification, so it is to assume that only those labelled as 'strugglers' have



Star attractions

THESE THREE RESOURCES FROM RISING STARS WILL HELP RELUCTANT AND LESS ABLE READERS TO FIND THEIR FEET...

The Docksides reading scheme features stories with contemporary themes and settings that give struggling readers in upper KS2 a second chance to master the basics. Each book has been written in carefully selected CVC words to help children revise and rehearse letter recognition, sounds and blends.

The Matt Merton Mysteries feature science fiction storylines with text appropriate for reluctant readers. The series tells the continuing story of Matt Merton, one man fighting for survival in the aftermath of an alien invasion. Designed to appeal to fans of comic books and graphic novels, the books will motivate reluctant and struggling readers.

Rising Stars eBookshelves will inspire young readers, whether in the classroom or at home. Many popular titles from the Rising Stars library have been converted into eBooks, enabling pupils to interact with the text and become enthused by reading onscreen.

For more information, visit risingstars-uk.com

TRY TO...

- > Encourage discussion and viewing of eBooks, TV series, films and create an environment that values reading of all kinds.
- > Show that short texts can be tricky and picture books too.
- > Revisit and practise basic phonic skills whenever possible.
- > Encourage talk about their reading to support meaning.

4 'Can but can't be bothered' readers

May struggle with...

- > Motivation.
- > Using the skills they have to tackle unknown words or meanings.
- > Finishing a book.

TRY TO...

- > Use class projects as well as their own hobbies to stimulate an interest and encourage it wherever you can. Value it.
- > Show them how they can use their phonics skills to tackle even quite tricky technical vocabulary.
- > Keep reading material short, chunked, visual and varied. Stamina will develop over time but value a breadth of reading.

5 'Can't or really struggling' readers

May struggle with...

- > The basic skills of decoding.
- > The basic skills of comprehension.
- > Speaking and listening skills.
- > Confidence and self-esteem.

TRY TO...

- > Use an approved catch up programme that allows for daily reteaching and practise of synthetic phonics/basic skills.
- > Use technology to support and motivate. Try eBooks, podcasts, apps and websites.
- > Find resources created to support this type of reader gain confidence.

So whether the children in your class struggle with learning to read or reading to learn, or with some of the more subtle struggles associated with being a particular type of reader, don't let them fall over; a stumble trip along the way is to be expected and is an opportunity.

face challenges and hurdles and that we need to help them through.

Reading types include children who may be described as:

1 'Keen and able' readers

May struggle with...

- > Overcoming a challenging read if they are used to finding most books quite easy.
- > Talking about their reading.
- > Finding books of suitable challenge and interest for their age.

TRY TO...

- > Help children through by reading a chapter of a challenging book with them. Use audio tapes or films to ease the way.
- > Provide reading groups in the class and encourage reading groups on line between schools.
- > Encourage research on suitable book sites, arrange visits from authors and librarians.

2 'Mad about' readers

May struggle with...

- > Letting go of a favourite author, e.g. Jacqueline Wilson.
- > Moving away from a certain type of book, e.g. jokes.
- > Finding the confidence or will to accept a new challenge.

TRY TO...

- > Use your school, local library and bookshop. Use online sites for book recommendations of the Amazon kind (people who liked that also liked...).
- > Have class and inter-class book swaps / recommendations to inspire change.
- > Read a class novel to try to hook them in / give them a taster of something new.

3 'Keen but less able' readers

May struggle with...

- > Confidence - being seen to read something that has the 'look' of a book for a younger reader.
- > Consistently applying their phonic skills to unknown words.
- > Comprehension.

struggles with their reading.

Nikki Gamble, education consultant and owner of Just Imagine Children's

Story Centre

(justimaginestorycentre.co.uk) promotes reading for learning and for pleasure for those children in the junior years. On the Oxford

Owl website for parents (oxfordowl.co.uk) she

talks about the need to acknowledge that children of all abilities will