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NLP Article: Struggling with the NLP Spelling Strategy - Teaching my 5-Year-Old to Spell

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Want to teach your kids good spelling habits? Or rapidly correct early bad spelling habits? Phonics works, but only with SIMPLE words. English is NOT a Phonic Language!

I have always been a great speller, though I know not everyone is/has been such. So I never had to learn a different way to spell -- somehow, I was wired to do it right. I actually find spellcheckers worse at spelling than I am. ;) But many people are not great spellers -- many either think they're relegated to being poor spellers for life, or, they know they can improve their spelling skills, but don't know how. Either way, that's unfortunate.

I don't know if everyone reading this knows about the NLP Spelling Strategy, but it's pretty well known by anyone who's taken longer NLP trainings. There are two kinds of spellers in this world -- great ones and poor ones. And there doesn't seem to be much room in between. Fortunately, we know why this is so -- Great & Natural spellers spell visually -- and poor spellers spell phonically. It's a matter of using the right internal strategy. And it CAN be trained easily to people who've been poor spellers for life -- IF they "do the drills to get the skills."

"Hooked on Phonics" has become one of the most popular children's home-teaching systems in America because it gets good results fast (with simple words, anyway). It may be teaching kids rapidly how to spell the easy stuff when everything else has failed -- but it IS teaching them the wrong way if they would want to be Great Spellers with a more complex adult vocabulary. At least, in English, that is. So personally I can't recommend that course to any parents of English-speaking children (Yes, I do see there's value there for those who use it because they don't know any better or don't have the time & knowledge to train spelling more effectively).

Why don't I recommend it? Because English is not a phonetically spelled language. (Why all teachers don't see this as obvious, and change the way spelling is taught on a National level, is beyond me).

Some of you may know Edgar Allen Poe's laughable example of this problem. See if you can tell me what this word says: "Ghoti"

It says "Fish." Phonetically, anyway, it CAN say "Fish." It could also say "Gotti." Or "Goatee." And there are other phonic options.

"Hogwash" you say? Look closely. This is valid in English:

"Gh" as in lauGH, "o" as in wOMen, "ti" as in

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locomotion. That is a valid phonetic spelling -- in English. Thank you very much, Edgar.

I hope the point is well taken.

Now as a parent of a 5-year-old (at present), I'm in the same boat. I started my daughter on symbolic & visual learning of words very early on -- but she didn't take to it very well or quickly, or I wasn't doing it optimally (probably the latter!). Don't get me wrong -- she doesn't seem 'challenged' to me -- I've used NLP with her in other areas and her results are skyrocketing; she swims like a Ghoti (fish) underwater without any flotation devices, has an unbelievable spoken vocabulary, shows evidence of outrageous lateral thinking, and already paints with an elegance I knew she COULD accomplish, but didn't quite 'expect.' (Note the difference -- if you show you don't think they CAN do things, they might not!).

But I digress. She wasn't taking to much of my NLP Spelling sessions with her. And now that she's in Kindergarten, they're spending lots of time on spelling -- and sure enough -- they're using Phonics.

So now that she has a passion for spelling (she spelled "TAMPA" all by herself yesterday in the car), I'm supplementing on the side with the visual approach. I'm not telling her the other way is the wrong way, I'm adding onto her existing strategy a new choice -- based on the NLP Spelling Strategy, and now, so far, she's going for it. I'm 'bootstrapping' onto the passion she now feels from using the other strategy to get quicker success, because of the time she's spending in the classroom on spelling. OK, let's be honest -- I'm hijacking her interest from the Phonic approach. :)

But then, I'm a great speller, and I'd like her to be one, two.

Er... too.

OK, so how am I doing this? Simple.

First, know & understand the difference between the phonic approach and the visual approach. The phonic approach is to "sound out the word from start to finish" -- purely an auditory approach. The NLP Spelling strategy is V->K (Visual -> Kinesthetic" only). No auditory at all.

Which means, while LEARNING the word's proper spelling, you see the word spelled forwards, correctly, you hallucinate/visualize the word spelled backwards, correctly, and then you feel good. No internal dialogue, no questions, sounding-things-out, etc. You do that process, repeatedly. Then, when spelling the word out again, as you write the letters, you compare the visual display of what's spelled out so far -- with your visual memory. If you've got the front of the word 100% matching the beginning of your memory, you feel good with each letter you add. If you've got any anomalies or mismatches between what you see & what you recall, you manufacture a yucky feeling somewhere.

Or you can do it when seeing someone else's already-completely-spelled words (i.e., see their words spelled badly, compare the entire visual field of that word with your visual memory, forwards and backwards, and then manufacture the good or bad feeling.

This is what makes a Great Speller -- or not.

So on to the next question. How am I giving my daughter the EARLY OPTION of becoming a great speller -- when either she apparently wasn't wired to want to learn to spell that way -- or I wasn't making it fascinating & fun enough for her to start with this approach?

Now that she's passionate about spelling in a really big way, we spend time talking & playing with spelling. We've now identified there's two ways to spell -- "sounding it out" which she likes, and "seeing/feeling it out."

And with the "seeing/feeling it out" way -- first we learn the word's proper

spelling. I write it out in full, forwards and backwards, on two flash cards or pages. Then I show it to her for 3-4 seconds each time, and we both "feel GOOOOOOD" at the end of it -- "acting as if" we feel warm & cuddly all over. Note we don't SAY 'feel GOOOOOOD' because that adds an auditory element. We do this several times -- and then we stop (before it gets boring)!

Then, we give it a rest, and do something else for a few minutes, and then we test it.

I ask her to spell the word she learned, and to do it with the "seeing/feeling" way. Which means, she puts a letter down, one at a time, compares it to her memory of how she saw it before, and she knows that either she should feel warm & cuddly all over -- or she should pretend to feel "yuck!" (Yes, I tinged it with a little humor just to get her going!).

That's it -- that's the system, in a nutshell.

At first, she reverted to sounding it out again, since that's what she knows well in school. However -- now -- she truly has two ways of doing it, and she & I practice together almost only the "seeing/feeling" way.

It's a tough balance to strike. I *never, ever* want to discourage her passion for learning. And I *always* want to optimize her learning experiences and give her the best chance of success as she develops. My approach isn't to say what's "wrong" -- but to provide more options. We shall see, I suppose, in time, if she chooses the visual approach!

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