Fingerpoint-Reading and Beyond: Learning About Print Strategies (LAPS)

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Young emergent readers often regard print as a prop for retelling a memorized story (Clay, 1967). This early form of reading has been referred to as pretend-reading or emergent storybook reading (Sulzby, 1985). Although many emerging readers can match their spoken rendition of a memorized story to the pages of a book, they are often unable to match their retellings to the print on the page. Mason (1982) believes children begin reading by recognizing the entire context of print but not print itself. This may explain Clay's (1967) early findings that children match print with the page, usually a page that includes a picture, rather than matching spoken words with the print on the page. In a second stage, Mason (1982) finds that children can recognize individual words or fingerpoint to words in the context of a memorized book, but are unable to generalize their print recognition ability to another context outside the covers of the memorized book. This more advanced type of pretend-reading involves pointing to the words as the text is recited verbatim from memory, or fingerpoint-reading. Several researchers and practitioners assert that helping children make the transition from the pretend-reading stage to the fingerpoint-reading stage is a very

In a recent study, Ehri and Sweet (1991) pursued the question of what enables emergent readers to make the transition from pretend-reading to fingerpoint-reading. At the conclusion of the study, they describe several "enabling" skills that use the transition from pretend to fingerpoint-reading. In addition to these "enabling skills," they drew upon the work of Holdaway (1979) to suggest several instructional practices that complemented their own findings to promote a successful transition for emergent readers from pretend to fingerpoint-reading. These enabling skills and instructional suggestions are listed below:

- Modeling fingerpoint-reading (pointing to enlarged text)
- Drawing attention to printed words and empty spaces to establish concepts about print (words, letters, punctuation, etc.)
- Recognizing words in print
- Developing an awareness of the alphabetic structure of print, phonemic awareness, and letter-sound associations.

Without these skills, according to Ehri and Sweet (1991), children have difficulty moving beyond pretend-reading into the more advanced behaviors associated with fingerpoint-reading. They assert that although teacher modeling and practice reading of memorized texts can benefit students' learning of basic print-related knowledge such as left-to-right orientation and a realization that spoken language corresponds to written or printed language, "... advanced exposure may enable beginners to catch on very quickly to finger-point reading once the enabling skills [shown in Figure 1] are acquired" (p. 460).
As evidence that young children can be helped to acquire these advanced or enabling skills, Ehri and Sweet cite a study by Reutzel, Oda, and Moore (1989) in which these researchers found that kindergarten age children can be helped to learn these more advanced skills which enable the transition from pretend-reading to fingerpoint-reading within the framework of the Shared Book Experience. The purpose of this article is to describe several instructional strategies that were used in the Reutzel, Oda, and Moore research study for moving children into successful fingerpoint-reading and beyond within the setting of a Shared Book Experience as well as to report some additional data supporting the use of these strategies.

**Learning about print strategies (LAPS)**

In the handbook for primary grade teachers published in Wellington, New Zealand *Reading in Junior Classes*, the need for focusing on print detail is described as well as general directions about how this is properly accomplished.

Children learning to read have to pay particular attention to print....But any learning of separate items needs to be combined with other items of information, both in the text and within the reader, before its use is truly understood and applied. Separate items of learning need to be taken back into reading, i.e., teachers should ensure that any item which has been isolated for attention should be looked at again in its original context, and what has been learned applied later in other contexts (p. 32).

From this perspective, Learning About Print Strategies (LAPS) should move from:

- The whole to the parts of the print
- The context of the memorized book to other print contexts and back
- The meaning to the visual or graphic dimensions of print.
The intent of LAPS is to assist younger readers to develop the enabling skills that lead to successful fingerpoint-reading as well as the ability to transfer the use of these skills to print contexts beyond the confines of memorized books. However, prior to discussing LAPS, we begin with a very important note of caution.

**Enjoy the book**

When first learning to read, younger children need easy books — books that are fun to read because the message, the story line, and the pictures match. A cardinal rule to observe when sharing easy books is to remember that these books are to be *enjoyed*. Consequently, no lesson which focuses attention on print aspects of easy books should be attempted before the book has been read through without interruption at least two or three times, so students can fully savor the beauty, the patterns, and the meaning of the story.

**Using LAPS**

As each book or story is read aloud and enjoyed, instruction using LAPS can already have begun. Children benefit the most from shared reading experiences in which the text has been enlarged and the teacher points to the text while reading aloud. This is very often the first and most natural step in using LAPS — one in which teachers can model how fluent readers operate. Second, teachers help point out during rereadings of the enlarged text other aspects of the visual display such as spaces, words, letters, or directionality. Third, teachers help children recognize sentences, phrases, and/or words in the context and out of the context of the book. For example, print from the book is shown on sentence strips or word cards displayed in pocket charts. Finally, teachers can revisit the books or stories on an occasional basis to focus on developing alphabetic and phonemic awareness. This is accomplished by focusing instruction on sentences, phrases, or
words that exemplify specific letter sound — letter symbol relationships singled out by the teacher for instructional attention. The LAPS strategies are presented in order of their use as described above. A final note of caution: it is not necessary to use all LAPS strategies in order and with every book. Teachers need to determine which LAPS strategies seem most appropriate for use with which books, and when they should be used.

Modeling fingerpoint-reading

Younger, novice readers often believe that the stories they hear and see are invented from the pictures in a book. However, at some point in their development, younger readers must make a critical connection between the voice of the reader and the print on the page. This connection between the oral and visual cues in a book is often referred to as "speech-print matching" or "voice pointing" (Yaden, 1986; Clay, 1967). It is an important insight for children to discover that the voice of the model reader matches the print on the page. Or put differently, the message of the story is signaled by the print on the page rather than invented from the pictures. Although not an exhaustive list, teachers can guide children into discovering the "speech-print match" in classrooms by using a variety of strategies elaborated briefly below.

Enlarging familiar print. In order to recreate the lap-reading experience between parent and child in a classroom filled with children, the print of familiar books needs to be enlarged. By enlarging print, Holdaway (1981) and Combs (1987) claim that children in a classroom can enjoy an experience with print similar to those they experienced on the lap of their parent when sharing a book. Many teachers have found that they can enlarge print of memorized books by purchasing commercially publish Big Books. In addition, chalkboards, sentence-strip pocket charts, overhead transparencies, chart
tablets, and word cards can be used to enlarge the print of a book for reading aloud, discussions, and demonstrations.

Point to the print. Clay (1972) indicates that pointing to the print is a critical strategy during the early stages of learning to read. To help children make the connection that the print is guiding the speech of the reader, parents often intuitively point to the print as they read. By using enlarged print, teachers, like parents, can point to the print with a group of children. From these demonstrations, children learn where words begin and end on the page, and the direction print moves — from left to right and top to bottom on a page. Pointing can also be used to identify specific print features such as lines, phrases, words, letters, or punctuation for discussion and attention.

Drawing attention to printed words and empty spaces

Framing specific print. To help children make the connection between familiar spoken text and the print on the page, teachers can use a technique called framing. This strategy is especially useful for helping children grasp, at a visual level, the concept of words and letters. For example, while reading aloud familiar lines from the book The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle, 1969), the teacher can frame selected parts of the text by cupping both hands around familiar lines, phrases, words, or letters (see Figure 1). After several teacher demonstrations, students can be asked to frame parts of the enlarged text for the group by cupping their hands around text segments the teacher reads aloud.

Masking selected print. Masking covers or conceals a part of print, thus directing children's attention. Various media can be used for masking selected print. Post-it notes can be
used quite easily to conceal a word, word part, letter, or punctuation mark. For example in the Big Book *Cats and Mice* by Rita Golden Gelman (1985), one teacher noted that many of the words in the text were participles or words ending in *ing*. A lesson was conducted on the sound of the word part *ing* by covering the *ing* ending on each word in the book with a Post-it note. During the next reading of the big book with the class, she uncovered the *ing* ending on each word while verbally emphasizing the *ing* sound. Children quite naturally learned the *ing* word ending in the context of rereading the familiar Big Book. Attention to other dimensions of print can be easily facilitated by using a masking technique.
Another approach to masking involves using a sliding print window. This device can be used to draw attention to any phrase, word, word part, or punctuation mark that is singled out for discussion. In Figure 2, a sliding print window is illustrated to draw attention to the word cat in the story The Little Red Hen (McQueen, 1985).

**Figure 2**
Masking print with a sliding window

Recognizing words in print: A focus on words
Developing the ability to recognize print, especially words and letters, in memorized books as well as in other contexts is a critical concept for young readers to achieve (Holdaway, 1979). Moving word recognition from memorized to unfamiliar print contexts is a step often neglected by parents and teachers as they guide their children through the process of learning to read. Because children often need help
to make the transfer of print recognition from memorized to unfamiliar print contexts, several bridging LAPS based on the work of Johnson and Louis (1987) can be used to help children acquire this conceptual understanding.

To help children begin to transfer print recognition from a memorized book or familiar context to an unfamiliar setting, begin by copying phrases, words, or word parts from a book such as, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* (Martin, 1983) onto sentence strips. Next, demonstrate the exact match between the print copied from the book onto the strips by pointing and framing. Then, ask children to match the strips or word cards containing the same print as the teacher frames in the book. For example, the teacher may frame between both hands the text shown in brackets as shown in Figure 3.

From this process, children make the visual connection or match between the book print and the same print displayed on sentence strips or other print displays. Children can be asked to pick up the sentence strip or word card and place it beneath the matching print in the book and explain why the two sets of print are the same. Children who see this process learn the strategies for making these critical print connections from watching their peers.

For word matching activities, it is best if structure words, such as *the, and, a, there*, etc., are not used. Only concrete nouns, action words, and descriptive words that have high visual imagery or memorable meanings should be used.

**Clozing in: The word cover-up.** Cloze involves the use of a piece of writing in which certain words have been deleted. Two variations of cloze that can be used to focus young readers' attention on either content or structure words
In memorized books are *progressive* and *regressive* cloze. In progressive cloze, the memorized book is first read aloud. Next, several words are deleted using Post-it notes as shown in Figure 4; and the text is read aloud again. Each time a deleted word is encountered children are asked to identify the missing word. When the deleted word is correctly identified, it is uncovered. For example in the story of the *Gingerbread Man* (1985) the entire text of the book may be read and then several pages used for a progressive cloze procedure.

**Figure 3**

*Matching print in a big book with print on sentence strips*

In regressive cloze, the process is begun by reading the entire text aloud also. Next, the text is reduced to only its
structure words by covering all content words with Post-it Notes as shown in Figure 5. Children are asked to identify the missing words.

**Figure 4**

*Progressive cloze covering the content, action, or descriptive words*

As each word is identified, the words are uncovered. By using these cloze variations, children begin to focus on identifying individual words in the context of the memorized book. After using these cloze variations within the context of the familiar, memorized book, these same cloze variations can be repeated outside the context of the memorized book. Again, sentence charts or sentence strips can be used to help students transfer their recognition of words in a familiar memorized book to other unfamiliar print settings as shown in Figure 6.
Other words too! After working with sentences, phrases, words, or word parts as suggested above, children can be asked what other words or phrases might be substituted in the text. For example, several sentence strips taken from the book, *The Napping House* (Wood and Wood, 1984), could be displayed as shown in Figure 7.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5**

*Regressive cloze begins by covering all words except structural words*

Children are asked to substitute other words in the place of the original words in the text — *dog, cat,* and *mouse.* These words along with the words found in the original text can be interchanged during subsequent rereadings. Exchanging these words helps children carefully focus on print details to determine which words have been switched in the text. Substitutions can often result in amusing variations of text.
which adds to students' enjoyment while attending to the printed features of text.

**What's wrong with the words here?** After working with sentences, phrases, words, or word parts on strips or cards as suggested above, erroneous text can be inserted prior to a subsequent reading. For example in the book *Mrs.Wishy-washy* (Cowley, 1980) the word *dud* can be inserted into the text in place of the original word *mud*.

**Figure 6**

*Moving the text to sentence strips for progressive or regressive cloze activities*

Then he [ ] out,

"Run, [ ]

as [ ] as you can.

can't [ ] me.

I'm the gingerbread [ ]."

The little [ ] ran after him.

Children are told that this text should say, 'Oh, lovely mud,' said the pig, and he rolled in it." (p. 4-5), but something is wrong here. Can you find what is wrong? Invite a volunteer to explain what is wrong and explain how the error can be corrected.

**Can you arrange these words?** After learning to detect single errors embedded in a text, sentence, or phrase, strips
can be physically cut apart, scrambled, and children asked to reorder the individual word cards to form the original sentence. A phrase taken from the book *The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and The Big Hungry Bear* (Wood and Wood, 1989), the original text is shown in the first sentence strip in Figure 9. Below the original text the scrambled text is shown.

Children must use their sense of the sentence order, or syntax, to reconstruct the order of the scrambled text and this causes them to focus on the print detail to discriminate one word from another.

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**Figure 7**

*Substituting meaningful alternatives into text*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Substitution Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And on that cat</td>
<td>And on that chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there is a mouse,</td>
<td>there is a worm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a slumbering mouse</td>
<td>a slimy worm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a snoozing cat</td>
<td>on a snoozing chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a dozing dog</td>
<td>on a lazy lamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a dreaming child</td>
<td>on a dreaming child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a snoring granny</td>
<td>on a snoring granny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a cozy bed</td>
<td>on a cozy bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'in a napping house,</td>
<td>in a napping house,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>where everyone is sleeping.</td>
<td>where everyone is sleeping.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing awareness of the structure of print

Attending to letter detail in print is the final and perhaps most abstract feature of language learning and learning about the reading process. However, it is nonetheless an important print information source that helps the transition from pretend-reading to fingerpoint-reading. Because this is true, teachers and parents need to understand how letter-sound association cues embedded in the text of memorized books may be used to help children learn more about the alphabet, sounds in words, and letter-sound associations. Learning to use letter-sound cues in text requires students to orchestrate two different modalities — listening and seeing. Students must first hear that sounds in words are temporarily sequenced in time to correspond with a left to right sequence in the visual order of letters in a word (Holdaway, 1986).

**Figure 8**

*Locating, explaining, and correcting erroneous text*

"Oh, lovely dud," said the pig, and he rolled in it.

Playing with sounds in memorized books is an exciting and enjoyable way for children to become acquainted with how letters and sounds function in connected text. Moreover, it is also an important means for learning phonics, phonemic segmentation, and blending skills in the context of reading connected text rather than isolating letter-sound association instruction from its use in reading (Newman and Church, 1990).

**Playing with sounds.** This process is begun by selecting several sentences, phrases, or words from a favorite memorized book. After having worked with these phrases as described in previous strategies to draw attention to print
details, sentences, phrases, words, and word parts, it may be appropriate to use these same text elements to extend students' understanding of how letters and sounds function within the context of familiar printed language.

**Figure 9**
Scrambled sentences taken from a memorized book

Are you going to pick that red, ripe strawberry?

Two strategies add enjoyment to learning letter-sound associations. The first of these two strategies is consonant substitution. When using the consonant substitution strategy, initial, final, or medial consonants of words in a sentence can be exchanged. For example, a sentence taken from the book *Noisy Nora* (Wells, 1973) and placed on a sentence strip may read as follows after exchanging the consonant sounds in the original sentence. Compare the original sentence with the exchanged version below.

*Jack was getting sleepy, and Father read with Kate.*
*Jack was ketting sleepy, and Father read with Gate.*

Younger children find the nonsensical result to be both humorous and helpful in understanding how consonants work in connected text. Other consonants may be exchanged in the future to vary the number of consonants exchanged and the position of the consonants in the words. This approach helps children segment and blend phonemes to enable recognition of words for finger-point reading and beyond. A caution should be noted at this point that this strategy does
yield nonsense words, but children understand the nature and origin of the nonsense and are therefore not led to believe that reading should routinely result in nonsense.

The second strategy is vowel substitution. When using a vowel substitution strategy, a single vowel (and sound) is selected and substituted in key words in the text. For example, a sentence taken from the book *Franklin in the Dark* (Bourgeois and Clark, 1986), and placed on a sentence strip may read as follows after substituting the short /a/ vowel sound into the text of the original sentence. Compare the original sentence with the exchanged version below.

"Well, did you find some help?" she asked.  
"Wall, dad you fand some halp?" she asked.

Children find that playing with sounds in this way turns learning about letters and sounds into a game. One first-grade, Chapter 1 student who had been working with his teacher late one afternoon using these strategies remarked on his way out the door to catch his bus, "Teacher, can we play some more games tomorrow?" This statement sums up the enthusiasm these two strategies generate among young children as they learn to focus their attention on the letter-sound associations embedded in print.

**Is this effective?**

The LAPS strategies described above have been evaluated in two local kindergarten classrooms. Forty-four kindergarten children read and discussed two selected Big Books in a shared reading experience. Results of a t-test of the two groups (24 total items) showed a statistically significant difference (p<.01) favoring the group participating in using the LAPS over those students who engaged in repeated practice readings of the selected Big Books. These results indicate that
the LAPS described above help children focus their attention on aspects of the print to a greater degree than do simple repeated readings of memorized books. In addition to this statistical evidence one teacher remarked, "I don't need worksheets now to practice reading skills or evaluate how well my students are learning to deal with print. I can use the print in real books they have come to know and I love to teach them!" Teachers who have used the LAPS believe that they can now teach their younger readers a host of print related concepts using the books and stories their children enjoy reading while helping them move from pretend-reading to fingerprint-reading and beyond.

References


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