

# Senses key to reading

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STAFF WRITER

If you ask someone to recall a specific event, chances are they will remember it in greater detail if they experienced it themselves.

The same concept applies to children learning how to read, write and spell. Instead of just seeing words on a page, students practicing the "revised" Orton-Gillingham method of instruction use all their senses to learn.

Lower elementary students at Roosevelt Elementary School in the West Bloomfield School District and Detroit Country Day Lower School in Bloomfield Township are being introduced to this method through the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education based in Birmingham.

At first, the lesson seems similar to most lower elementary reading instruction, beginning with a review of sounds on flash cards. But the revised Orton-Gillingham method is more focused on phonics and kinesthetics, compared to the generally used whole-language approach that combines reading comprehension with writing and spelling, according to Roosevelt reading consultant Julie Abeska.

The problem — not all children learn the same way. "No matter who you talk to, educators will say no one thing works for everybody," Abeska said. "You've got to just give kids a whole toolbox of things they can use."

And a group of five first graders at Roosevelt Elementary School seemed to be having a lot of fun with the revised method. During their reading lesson, the group pulled out lunch trays filled with colored sand and, with their fingers, began writing letters that corresponded with sounds Abeska recited. The West Bloomfield resident used flash cards to put sounds together to form words and "nonsense," but

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nonsense or not, the students still pronounced the constructions. As Abeska recited more sounds, students held up tongue depressors labeled with sounds and pictures of items containing the sound.

For "red words," things got a little more intense. Red words are words that are more difficult to learn since they don't comply with typical sound constructions. With papers perched atop bumpy boards, pieces of plastic needle point boards, the children wrote the red word "what."

After writing and saying the word, they removed their papers and felt "what" by tracing it with their fingers. As students spelled "what" aloud, they tapped their arm once for each letter working from the shoulder down. By the end of the lesson, students wrote a sentence using the word "what."

"I think the biggest change is they're excited and want to have time to read," Abeska said, adding that younger students associate the hands-on approach with playtime. "They're having fun and they are learning a lot."

Rhonda Ledford, whose daughter Lauren is learning to read through the Orton-Gillingham method at Roosevelt is very pleased with the results.

"I think she's improved 100 percent," the West Bloomfield resident said. "I tried working with her at home and I couldn't get through to her."

Ledford said her daughter has progressed from pronouncing sounds to reading and it's improving her confidence as well. Instead of getting frustrated with the more difficult words, Ledford said, her daughter takes her time with the pronunciation now.

Roosevelt Principal Dr. Paul Lipson said the training has become an integral part of reading instruction at Roosevelt. The

revised Orton-Gillingham method is not just taught to "at risk" students at Roosevelt, but is also "used with students in which traditional methods haven't proved to be very successful," Lipson said. The purpose is to help all children read on their own by the time they reach third grade.

"There is now research right now that combining phonics with content is the way to go in early intervention," Lipson said. "It seems to suit our needs here at Roosevelt."

Abeska, along with a first-grade teacher, two special education instructors and a Title I teacher, were trained by the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education. Federal Title I grant money plus district funding paid for the training. This summer, all Roosevelt kindergarten through second-grade teachers will be trained so they can bring the method to their entire classrooms.

"I know that the teachers are finding it very successful," Lipson said.

Mike Steklac, city manager of Keego Harbor, and his wife, Teresa Steklac, are pleased to know their 6-year-old daughter Katy will be able to continue using the revised method in her studies at Roosevelt Elementary.

The family plans to move to West Bloomfield this summer and register Katy for the first grade.

Teresa Steklac is very familiar with the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education, having received parent training when her daughter began kindergarten in the Riverview school district.

Through her mother's help and kindergarten, where the revised Orton-Gillingham method was used, Katy went from reading a few words to entire sentences.

"I think it gives her a good basis in reading," Teresa Steklac said. "And I can work with her during the summer."



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Reading Fun: Roosevelt Elementary first grade student Lauren Ledford of West Bloomfield Township displays a tongue depressor topped off with a picture of an item containing the sound her instructor recites.

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