The Principles that Teachers Need to Follow

Research informs us that we should follow these principles when teaching reading:

The Prototype

- Teach a 'sound-to-print' orientation. Sounds, not letters, are the basis for the code.

- Teach phonemes (individual sounds) only – no other unit.

- Begin with the Basic Code (a one-to-one correspondence between the 40–44 sounds and their most common spelling).

- Teach children to identify and sequence sounds in real words by segmenting and blending, using letters.

- Teach children how to write each letter. Integrate writing into every lesson.

- Link writing (spelling) and reading to ensure children learn that the alphabet is a code and that codes are reversible: encoding/decoding.

- Lessons should move on to include the advanced spelling code (the **136** remaining common spellings). All sounds in English have more than one spelling.

Teachers must avoid any technique, strategy, or tool that will mislead children, and this means:

- **No letter names.** Letter names are a source of 'noise' which block an automatic connection between sounds and their spellings. 'Catch-up' readers in particular, rely on a strategy of mixing sounds and letter names when they try to decode.

- **No sight words.** Remember, no one can learn to read by memorising whole words by sight (see Introduction), and research consistently shows that whole-word memorisation has a highly negative impact on learning to read. Even the Exception words (see p19) can be partly decoded phonetically.

- **No guessing.** There is no need to guess in a sound-based methodology. Guessing creates a climate of insecurity. Beginning readers and flawed readers need a climate of security to access the code successfully.

Diane McGuinness, p.121 and p323 Early Reading Instruction, MIT Press 2004

Diane subsequently mirrored the Prototype with the child's understanding if taught this way.

The Understanding of the Learner

If the teacher follows these principles, the learner will understand that:

- I know that words are made up of individual sounds.

- I know there are about 44 sounds in our language.

- When we write words we mark each sound by a letter or more than one letter.

- When we read we turn the letters back into sounds again to find the word.

- Our spelling system 'doesn't play fair' because there is more than one way to spell each sound.

- My teacher shows me how to find the spellings, and we sort them.

- I discover that sometimes a spelling has more than one sound, so we sort them as well by listening for a real word.

- I know I can read everything my teacher has taught me.

- I know I can learn to spell everything my teacher has taught me.

Note for teachers: You take responsibility!

If you look at the above from the learner's point of view you will notice how simple the teaching task is, as long as you, the teacher, know the code! 'Catch-up' readers have lost control. SRS will provide the learners with the keys which will give them a strategy to empower them, and will teach them to become independent learners.

The next chapter deals with the different types of learner and the different Teaching Pathways used to teach them.