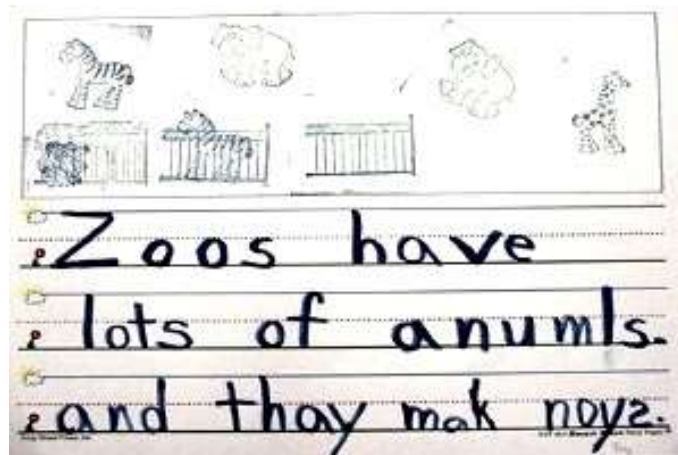


Why Do They Do That?

- Phonetic Spelling



Phonetic spelling means that words are spelt how they sound, not how they look.



In order to understand why some kids spell phonetically, we need to look at the early childhood developmental sequence in a very different way. The contemporary interpretation of this sequence has us seeing a child's development in a rather gross way, without understanding how this developmental period actually allows us to perform increasingly sophisticated and refined tasks as we grow up and age. The consequences of this is a wealth of beliefs and myths, which don't actually have any substance to them and don't allow us to understand what has gone wrong for these kids. Fundamentally, we need to understand that the reason why children struggle is not and never was an educational issue. It is entirely a matter of the child's functional performance ie: their capacity to perform these tasks. There is no other answer here, except how a child's performance has been disrupted, leading to their inability to perform those tasks they struggle with; and we need to know what that disruption actually is, or we will not be able to improve upon the performance of the child.

Functional kids do not struggle

Phonetic spelling and priorities

Phonetic spelling is only ever an indicator or a symptom of a much deeper issue. It would be a mistake to assume that we can correct the child's performance by having them practice spelling, and the fact that this doesn't work, should really give us pause to stop and consider what the child is telling us about their ability to perform the task. This idea that we only need practice what we cannot do, in order to suddenly and magically be able to do it, has become one of the most pervasive and erroneous of our time. When a child struggles to perform a task, they are telling us they cannot do it, which is always a reflection of their functionality, and not the behavioural issue that many might have us believe.

At the core of our capacity to perform any and all tasks is also our capacity to make sense of the world. All of our performance contains two inter-related and reciprocal facets – that ability to make sense of the world and our ability to generate the necessary performance to actually do the task. Both of these facets require the exact same skills, abilities and processes, just in a reciprocal relationship to each other. The easiest way to demonstrate how this works is to take one ability we must possess, in order to be functional in this world – pattern recognition and construction.

It is our visual perceptual performance, which allows us to perform some truly demanding tasks and do so without ever thinking about **how** we perform them. In fact, the reality is that most people have never considered how they do the things they do and, those who have, have typically done so from that rather superficial perspective. Fundamentally, anything we do, we do on the basis of something we have perceived and it is not until we begin to understand how we have generate the worldview we look out upon and engage in every day, that we begin to understand why kids struggle.

Priorities in Perceptual Performance

In order to develop our dynamic ability to make sense of our world, we need to develop our perceptual capacity in such a way that allows us to receive information through any one sense, and immediately relate it to all information we have previously received through other senses, and integrated. We are able to do this because at different times during the early childhood developmental sequence, different areas of perceptual performance hold the position of priority.

What this means is that one area of perception will hold a peak or primary position, and all other sensory information received through other areas of perception is processed and



integrated relative to whatever area has the priority in the moment. This allows us to develop the capacity to receive sensory information through any one sensory modality and immediately recognise that object because of the composite image we have created of it. If we did not do this we would be beset by sensory information that we do not understand. A great example of how we do this is what we know 'apple' to be. Over our lifetime we have smelt, seen, heard, tasted and felt 'apple' in a variety of different contexts, and are able to recognise an apple in so many different ways, even if we are just presented with a piece eg: a seed.

The First Priority

For the first 3-3½ months of life, a child's priority in perceptual performance is in auditory perception. Any of us can look at a new born baby and see that they are primarily responsive to sound. They readily turn their head toward sound or even lie their listening to the world go by. Soon we notice that they are also reaching toward sound and even repeating certain actions in order to generate a sound.

The Second Priority

At around 3-3½ months of age, the child begins to move into physiologically based perceptual performance. This is an incredibly substantial area of performance, in which motor performance and control is developing, as well as all aspects of tactile performance, strength, rhythm and co-ordination, proprioception, etc are also developing. All other sensory information received through other sensory modalities is related to this priority.

The Third Priority

At around 3-3½ years of age, a child needs to step into the priority of visual perceptual performance, in order to be fully functional. It is this priority that allows human beings to refine their performance to degree we can. In the work I have done with professional athletes, I know that it is possible to assist them to improve upon their performance in some very interesting ways, just by refining their visual perceptual performance. I know how important visual perceptual performance is, in our capacity to perform all those amazing tasks we can and I also know that kids who struggle are telling us that they have not been able to step into this priority. If we give these kids the ability to do exactly this and then spend a little time refining that performance, amazing things happen very quickly. We see their struggles resolve and them go on to perform at a comparable or better level as their peers.



Phonetic Spelling

The reason why children spell phonetically is because they have not stepped into the priority of visual perceptual performance. They have not done this, because they cannot and this is not a reflection of a 'different learning style' but of a functional deficit, which needs to be addressed or the child will always struggle.

Literacy is essentially about knowing how sounds look and how words and letters sound. These children have the auditory component worked out, but cannot relate this to the visual component, because they cannot step up into that priority, because the structure of the brain will not let them do this on their own. Either the brain was damaged in some way at some point in time, or something interfered with its development in some way. In most situations this damage is minor and most children can have their struggle completely resolved in very short period of time, if they receive the appropriate therapy. We do need to be aware, however, that these children do need a specific treatment, which allows the underlying visual perceptual deficit to be corrected, or they will continue to struggle for the rest of their lives.

Most children can have their struggle completely resolved with only a few therapy sessions, and that includes kids on the autism spectrum and most other neurological and cognitive conditions.

The human brain is a marvellous organ. It responds quickly to being exposed to new ways of connecting the dots and making sense of the world. Children are also incredibly little things, because we can show them new ways of doing things and they will naturally go out in the world and make use of new modes of performance in everything that they do. This means that there is little to no need for any therapy 'homework' because the child will do it all themselves.

How do we know a child may struggle?

One way parents can see if their child is likely to struggle at school, is by determining the child's [developmental age](#). This is a simple thing to do, and allows us to determine the age level a child is actually performing at. I strongly suggest all parents do this, because it provides a tremendous degree of insight into why kids do what they do. For example, if a child of 8 years has a developmental age of 5 years, we would not expect them to perform as an 8 year old, and this would also explain a lot about the child's behaviour.

Another way of seeing if a child is likely to struggle; or if they are struggling, is to determine what may be going on within their visual perceptual performance. **VisualPerceptual** provides the **free** [Visual Perceptual Screening Tool](#) available to all parents. This tool makes use of the



things we all can observe and identifies the things that typically indicate that a child may have a visual perceptual deficit.

We are also happy to review the screening tool in conjunction with some video of the child performing various tasks. While we tend to do this as a [pre-school screening](#) of the child, there is nothing stopping any parent completing in the screening tool, taking some video and book and appointment to speak with us about what that reveals about the child's performance. Just click on this [link](#) and follow the instructions outlined there.

If you do take up this offer, you should also know that the Visual Perceptual Therapy is available via Skype, meaning that it doesn't matter where in the world you are, you can work with us.

VisualPerceptual also offers provides a consultation service via Skype in which you can discuss your child's performance and receive professional advice on how to help them. You can make an appointment for that consultation here

 Book Now!

Welcome to my world, the world of visual perceptual performance

Natoya Rose
Occupational Therapist

