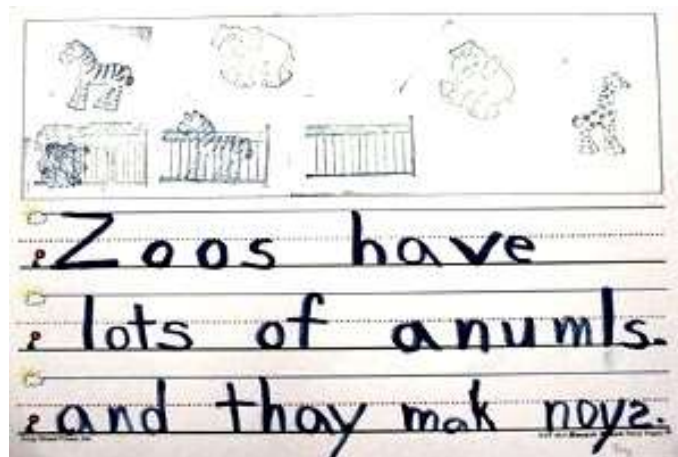


Why Do They Do That?

- Phonetic Spelling



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



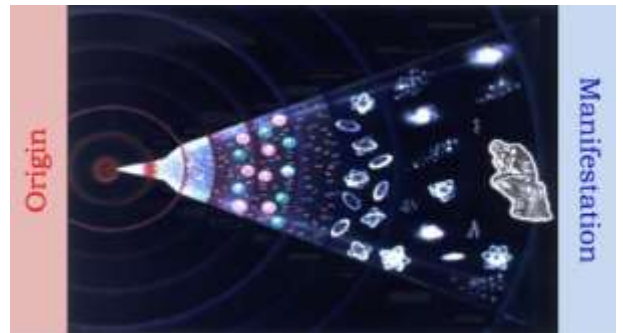
In order to understand why some kids spell phonetically, we need to look at the early childhood developmental sequence in a different way. The contemporary understanding of the developmental sequence has us seeing a child's development in a rather gross way; however, it doesn't answer the question of how we can ever perform tasks such as sitting, standing, walking, talking, etc. It is this failure to answer this most basic of questions, which underpins our lack of understanding of how human beings can perform some truly amazing tasks and why things have gone wrong for the kids who struggle.

Ultimately, phonetic spelling is indicative of a developmental disorder, where the child continues to perform at a lower than expected level, simply because they are unable to progress through the developmental sequence as required. At their core, all actions we take in this world are in response to something we have perceived and, in order to perceive, we need to be able to process and integrate sensory information. Consequently, a child's breakdown in

task performance can always be traced back to a breakdown in perceptual performance and, if we address their struggles from here, rapid and profound resolution of the struggle typically occurs.

If you have never considered how it is you perform the many tasks you do, as a matter of course during the day, I encourage you to consider this now. The stark reality for most of us is that we can look at what we are doing, but it immediately becomes apparent that we have no idea how we are doing it. We may believe that a child is struggling with something relatively simply, but how do we know this, if we do not know how we are performing that task ourselves. I communicate with a lot of different people all around the world and I have yet to find anyone who has fallen down the same rabbit hole as I did and yet I have no trouble finding a great many ‘experts’ who believe they have the answers for these kids’ struggles. I want to assure you that they do not and, while it is possible to improve upon a child’s performance a little, from that contemporary perspective, there are huge risks that come with doing this; not least of all, causing a lifetimes worth of psychological and emotional issues for these kids. Fundamentally, we must understand how we do what we do, in order to correct problems when they occur.

Phonetic spelling, along with any other thing we can see a child doing, is an access point to a deeper level of understanding of the child’s performance. We call these observations *functional indicators of visual perceptual performance*, because they are functional pointers to what has gone wrong at the point **before** their task performance is being generated. Basically, a breakdown in perceptual performance means that sensory information is not being processed and integrated, therefore there are gaps or holes in what is being perceived and, when it comes to performing a task, it is being performed on the basis of the child not having all of the required information in order to do so, functionally and effectively.



Literacy and numeracy tasks are, in reality, highly refined and sophisticated tasks. When a task is refined, we have taken it from its most gross level of performance and honed our skill base over and over again, until we can perform at a very focused level and in a very subtle way. The fact that a child of 5 years, or younger, is even capable of recognising and naming letters, and even some words, is a phenomenal feat for sure, and we really need to understand how amazing this is. Any child’s performance in any moment of the day, is the sum total of everything that has gone before now.



Our task performance is constructed of layer, upon layer, upon layer of task performance, however, the core of this performance contains is always comprised of the exact same skills, abilities and processes, they are just being expressed through different avenues in the body. But, as the level we are performing at increases, so too does the volume of sensory information we are

processing, and it does taken much for these volumes to increase exponentially. I have often said that the only thing a child need do, to massively and substantially increase the volumes of sensory information they are exposed to, is to grow taller.

Our worldview is always multi-facetted and multi-dimensional, regardless of whether we have appreciated this or not. We need to be able to approach and object or situation from a multitude of different perspectives, in order to make sense of it all, and those different perspectives include the different sensory modalities we may first receive information from. an example of this is how we experience ‘apple’. Our experience comprises of a multitude of different visual images of apple – apple sauce, apple, pie, apple juice, apple seeds, apple skin, diced apple, sliced apple, apple on a tree, apple on the ground, green apple, red, apple, yellow apple, rotten apple, dried apple, photos of apples, pictures of apples, apples on computers or shampoo bottles, etc; however, we also know what apple smells like and taste like and what it sounds like when someone is biting into one. If someone places an apple in our hands, we can identify it by touch and we know a shampoo is apple scented by smelling it. All of our experiences of ‘apple’ come together as a complete experience of apple, created from all of the information we have ever received through our senses and in a wide variety of different contexts. When someone says, “Apple,” we know what that means in a very complete and dimensional way, including, knowing that apple is a fruit and that it is also different from other fruit.



In order to develop such a dynamic ability to make sense of our world, we need to develop our perceptual capacity in a way that allows us to receive information through one sense, and immediately relate it to information we have previously received through other senses, and integrated. This happens through our various areas of perceptual performance having the priority for a time, during our developmental sequence.

Priorities in Perceptual Performance

At different times during the early childhood developmental sequence, different areas of perceptual performance hold a position of priority. What this means is that the child is still receiving sensory information through all of their different senses and it is all being processed, however, this is occurring relative to one specific area of perceptual performance. This allows us to develop the capacity to receive sensory information through one sensory modality and apply it to information we have already integrated. If we weren't able to do this, we would not be able to form the necessary inter-relationships between pieces of sensory information and construct our worldview.

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. I currently work with professional athletes, using my expertise in visual perceptual performance to assist them in stepping up their game in some interesting ways. I know how important visual perceptual performance is, in the refinement of performance. Without this we would not be able to perform those highly refined and sophisticated tasks, such as literacy and numeracy. Interestingly, it is exactly this that any child who struggles is demonstrating to us ie: that they have not stepped into the priority of visual perceptual performance.

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.

VisualPerceptual also offers [free consultations for parents](#), in which they can discuss their concerns about their child with me. These consultations are kept relaxed and practical, making use of the observations we can all make, and providing commonsense answers as to why a child is doing what they are.

VisualPerceptual offers [The Visual Perceptual Therapy](#) all around the world via Skype, meaning that you do not have to travel to have access to this ground breaking therapy, so please feel free to [book a free consultation today](#).

*With that, I would like to welcome you to my world,
The world of visual perceptual performance*

*Natoya Rose
Occupational Therapist*

