

Well read

For frustrated students and parents, finally a little hope

By ROBERT KOEPCKE • Staff Writer

Sorry kids ... like it or not, the school year is quickly approaching.

For some, that means the usual — books, teachers, hallway shenanigans.

For others, however, it heralds the pressure of having to pretend, every minute of every day, that they can read.

As more Americans become aware of the pervasiveness of illiteracy in the U.S., many parents and educators face the challenge of doing something about it. But for children with learning disabilities or attention disorders, the task seems insurmountable. And the feeling of being left behind leads to anxiety, frustration and depression.

Local educator Karen Truncellito has seen her share of supposedly "impossible" cases — kids that the experts said would never learn to read.

And of the ones she's been charged with teaching, she says nearly all of them have caught up to the reading level of their peers.

Truncellito, a former teacher in the New York City school system and at the Saints Philip and James School, has in her long career as a reading specialist developed a system for teaching children how to read.

She's recently published a book on the subject, "Easy Steps to Reading."

According to Truncellito, most students today are taught to read using a "whole

language" technique, which assumes that reading and writing comes naturally for kids who can speak a language. With such an approach, children memorize the thousands of written forms of words they know. If they come across a word they don't know, they sound it out, one syllable at a time. And this usually works. Usually.

Many kids, however, simply don't have the self-discipline to learn in this manner. And they often get left behind.

Truncellito's book offers a "phonetic" approach to reading, one that she says is much easier for youngsters that have trouble concentrating.

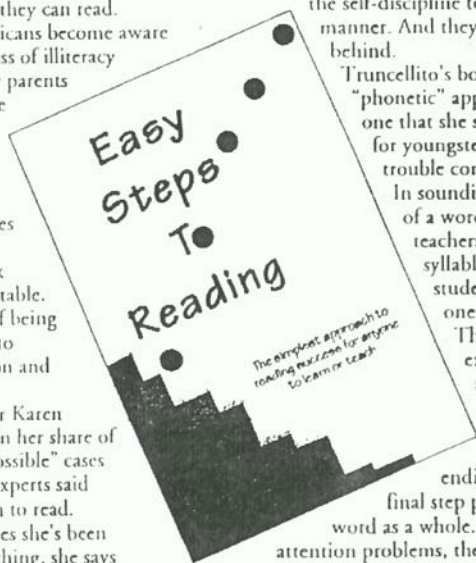
In sounding out the syllables of a word, traditional teachers break words into syllables, and have students learn the word one syllable at a time.

The word "stick," for example, gives students four steps to understand, "st-", the vowel sound, the ending "-ck" and a

final step pronouncing the word as a whole. But for kids with attention problems, the first step is often lost before the syllables can ever be put together. Some students cannot even get to the second syllable in a word without forgetting the first. Truncellito's technique turns the word inside out, and cuts the approach to only two steps. She starts students with the vowel sound, and adds the ending "-ck" to that sound. Then students go back and add the "st-" to the "ick." Thus, the student is not faced with having to go back and recite the word as a

Exton educator Karen Truncellito has developed a new technique to help children who are having trouble learning to read.

Photo by Robert Koepcke



whole; she's already done it.

Students are taught bunches of words at a time, words that have common endings, like "stick," "brick," and "kick."

Truncellito's technique thus offers students a "code" by which they can learn language, instead of overloading them with information. And with this monosyllabic starting point, students can learn to tackle longer words.

The same approach, according to Truncellito, could be utilized by anyone learning to read, including all children as well as adults.

"I feel this is honestly the easiest way to go," says Truncellito. "I've researched a lot, and I've tried a lot. It works. And for children that nothing else works for, it's the only thing that works."

Students often come to Truncellito, who tutors reading using her innovative approach, because they've tried everything

else to no avail.

"Once a parent said to me 'You're our last resort,'" she recalls. "Doctors and specialists examined the student, they did tests. They said he was neurologically impaired."

"They told me 'This is the end of the line.'"

According to Truncellito, the student was actually a very intelligent boy, but the typical techniques of teaching reading weren't suited to how he processed information.

According to Truncellito, the student is now in high school, reading at his grade level.

Truncellito says that the new approach is effective because parents can use it with their students at home.

"Parents can get involved," she says. "The message to parents is: start at home. Parents don't have to wait for the school to solve the problem."

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