Attending to Words in Isolation: When, Why, and How?

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When?

“Once the child is ready to move beyond the ‘breaking words’ activities (see pp. 42–45), … LL, Pt. 2, p. 139

“If you need extra time to work on words in isolation squeeze in a minute or two at the magnetic board after letter work and breaking words apart have become easy.” LL. Pt. 2, p. 139

When?

“ ‘Working with words in isolation’ occurs anywhere in a lesson when the teacher pays detailed attention in isolation to a few words that are moving into this child’s repertoire. The activities refresh and repeat successful recent experience… and consolidate some links.” LL, Pt. 2, p. 150
“there is a sequence of learning...”
LL, Pt. 2, p. 126

1. Breaking words apart was easy learning, because...
2. The learner who is very familiar with "breaking words apart" in more than one way is very likely to show this competence during reading and will "take words apart in reading".
3. Studying 'words in isolation', comparing and contrasting similarities and differences, is a final stage of control over the hierarchy of skills, not a first step.

Why?
“Control over directional behavior in reading, supplemented by practice in writing messages, compels children to observe each letter in turn and makes them attend to order. Until this is learnt reading is extremely unsystematic, consisting of a hit-or-miss recognition of a few letters within a few words. (COT, pp. 171–172)

Why?
“Differentiation divides wholes into separated parts. Unitization occurs when known parts which consistently occur together are processed as a functional unit.”
(COT, p. 170)
**Visual learning is on two journeys**
(COT, p. 175)

- Coming to know the differentiated detail and then regrouping this into some unitized chunks
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rough pattern</th>
<th>Differentiated detail</th>
<th>Unitized chunks</th>
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- Responding faster and faster with minimal attention
  
  - Slow
  - Faster
  - Minimal attention

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**Why?**

“After the fine detail of the word has been learned, and can be recovered if necessary, then presumably faster responding is achieved by responding to larger units, chunks or patterns.”
(COT, p. 166)

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**Why?**

- Words in continuous text favors learning about word probabilities.

- Words in isolation favors learning about letter sequences.
(COT, p. 171)
Why?

“The goal of all forms of word analysis for the reader is to be able to take words apart, on the run, while reading…” LL, Pt. 2, p. 132

Early word learning: Sequence of difficulty
(LL, Pt. 2, pp. 140-143)

• Learning on words I know
• Look for similarities
• Learning to substitute an initial letter
• Compare three words in a set – changing the first letter
• Change the onset – and retain the rime
• Retain the onset and change the rime

A gradient of difficulty for ‘words in isolation’
(LL, Pt. 2, p. 148)

Constructing words
• Supply the full word model or all the letters needed.
• Change the onsets and retain the rime (giving attention to first letters).
• Retain the onset and change the rime (giving attention to last letters).
• Choose the words for the children (from elsewhere in the lesson).
• The child thinks of words but the teacher selects the most appropriate.
• The teacher introduces new words suitable for this child to increase his flexibility.