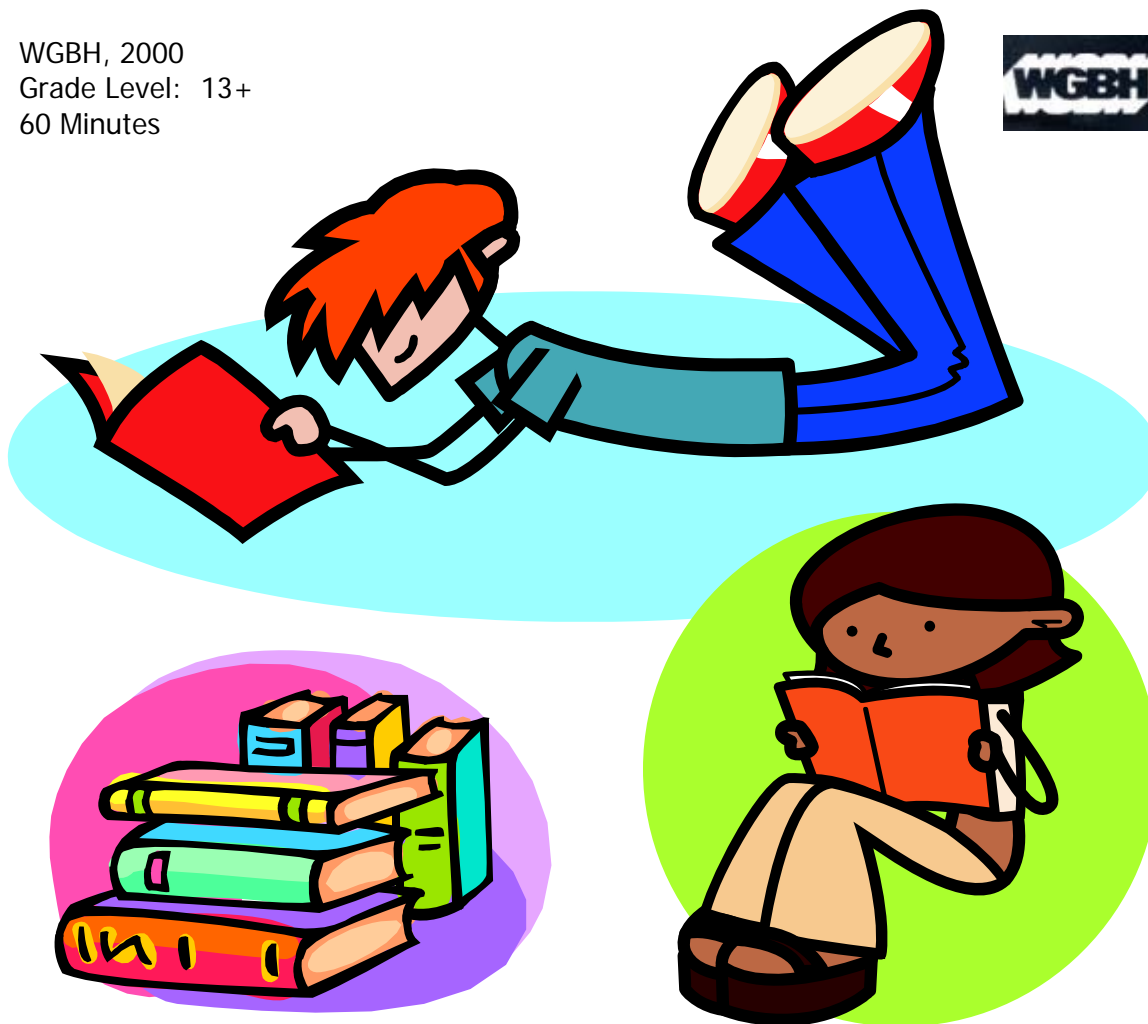


#10670 MASTERING THE CHALLENGE OF READING

WGBH, 2000
Grade Level: 13+
60 Minutes



CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

[#9728 BUILDING LITERACY COMPETENCIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD](#)

[#9812 WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!](#)

[#10665 ATTENTION](#)

[#10668 GETTING THOUGHTS ON PAPER](#)

[#10669 LANGUAGE](#)

Developing Minds

About the Developing Minds Video Library



The *Developing Minds* multimedia library features the work of All Kinds of Minds, a private non-profit Institute, affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All Kinds of Minds offers a broad range of programs and resources that enable parents, educators, and clinicians to help children and adolescents with differences in learning achieve success in school and life. The Institute was co-founded by Dr. Mel Levine, who for more than 25 years has pioneered innovative programs to enhance the understanding and management of students' learning difficulties. Dr. Levine's comprehensive neurodevelopmental model draws on research from a wide range of disciplines. A renowned developmental-behavioral pediatrician, Dr. Levine is also Professor of Pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Medical School and Director of the University's Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning.

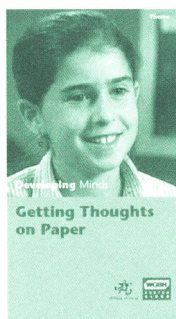


all kinds of minds

Developing Minds is a library of 22 videotapes with accompanying guides. The library is designed to help parents and teachers of elementary and middle-school children explore differences in learning through the approach and conceptual framework of developmental-behavioral pediatrician, author, and professor Dr. Mel Levine.

The heart of the collection, which features children and early adolescents with diverse learning profiles, is divided into *theme* and *construct* videos. The eight theme videos focus on children's struggles and successes with skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as well as difficulties in communication, understanding, organization, feelings, and behavior. The eight construct videos begin where the theme videos end, illuminating breakdowns in such key areas of brain function as attention, memory, language, neuromotor, social cognition, temporal-sequential ordering, spatial ordering, and higher order cognition.

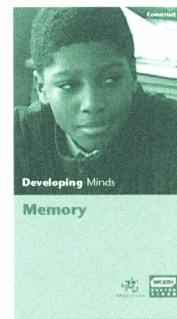
Dr. Levine guides viewers through the videos as he and other experts, teachers, parents, and children provide commentary and strategies. Together, the videos and print guides promote an understanding of learning differences—strengths and weaknesses—and strategies that help children become successful learners. This material also gives parents and teachers a common language to advance effective communication between home and school.



Theme Videos

Present the learning problems and successes of children and early adolescents (40–60 minutes each)

- Mastering the Challenge of Reading
- Getting Thoughts on Paper
- Thinking with Numbers
- Understanding
- Student Output: Producing, Performing, and Communicating
- Getting Organized/Work Habits
- Feelings and Motivation
- Behavioral Complications



Construct Videos

Provide deeper insight into specific neurodevelopmental breakdowns that contribute to differences in learning (30–60 minutes each)

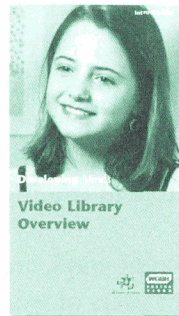
- Attention
- Language
- Neuromotor Function
- Memory
- Social Cognition
- Temporal-Sequential Ordering
- Spatial Ordering
- Higher Order Cognition

How to Use

Together, this video and guide can be used to increase awareness and gain a deeper understanding of children's difficulties learning to read. The video is divided into three segments: Observations, Teacher Strategies, and Parent Strategies. Observations features home and classroom scenes of children struggling with the reading subskills of decoding, comprehension, and reading retention. Teacher Strategies and Parent Strategies provide practical suggestions from Dr. Mel Levine, other experts, teachers, parents, and the children themselves to help children address a variety of reading problems.

The structure of the guide is similar to the videos, with sections on Observations, Teacher Strategies, and Parent Strategies. In addition, the guide provides a glossary of terms used in the video, a checklist of signs of reading problems, a brief background article on reading, and resources for further information.

There are many ways to use these materials, including watching the video alone, working with a partner, participating in a teacher or parent study group, or using the video and guide at a parent-teacher association gathering. However you choose to use them, these materials will provide insight into important difficulties that children experience in reading. The Viewing Tips on page 5 offer key questions to reflect upon after watching.



Tips for Using

- Scan the guide and read the introduction and background article. Watch the entire video, then rewatch it, using sections of the guide to reinforce what you see.
- To find information that addresses your needs, go directly to a particular section of the guide, such as Explore the Video, then view related video segments—or refer to the guide alone.
- Begin exploring the video library with *Mastering the Challenge of Reading* for an overview of the topic. Then watch related construct tapes, such as *Attention*, *Language*, and *Memory* for information on key neurodevelopmental functions that affect reading.

Management by Profile Videos

Introduce a systematic process for developing an individualized educational path based on a child's neurodevelopmental strengths and weaknesses; *A Student Profile* showcases a child as he moves through the process (20–30 minutes each)

- Strategies for Parents
- Strategies for Teachers
- A Student Profile

Introduction Videos

Provide a brief description of the video library components; the Parents' and Teachers' videos also introduce the philosophy and approach of Dr. Mel Levine (10–20 minutes each)

- Video Library Overview
- Introduction for Parents
- Introduction for Teachers



Introduction

"In a test or book, when I open it up, and it's just full of, like, words and no pictures, it gets me frustrated because you have to start and it takes a long time and it's hard."

—Georgia,
seventh grade student

"When I read, I don't pay attention. . . . Then they ask me to say what it was about . . . I won't say it, because I forget about it. I don't understand."

—Henry,
seventh grade student

Feelings of frustration, confusion, and low self-esteem are common among children and early adolescents with reading problems. Their teachers and parents frequently experience tension and anxiety. Fortunately, the outlook for reading success is improving. Reading researcher Dr. Louisa Moats has stated that the intensive research on reading conducted during the last 20 years gives hope that most children can be taught to read.

In recent years, Dr. Mel Levine and other researchers have examined aspects of brain function that are involved in the acquisition of language and the reading process. Research indicates that many kinds of brain functions are needed to interpret written words. Most researchers agree that attention, memory, and language are among the key neurodevelopmental functions that play a role in reading.

Children learn to read at different rates, in different ways, and with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Reading is a process that requires years of work and children and early adolescents may encounter difficulty anywhere along the way. As Dr. Levine points out, "It's very common for decoding problems to manifest themselves in the earliest grades. Comprehension problems very commonly start about third or fourth grade and move on up into middle school. And difficulty with reading retention is a very common plight in secondary school."

Ensuring reading mastery at all grade levels means giving children the tools they need to decode words, comprehend written material, and retain what they have read and understood.

Decoding

The first task for children is recognizing that letters on a page stand for sounds. Words represent a code for sounds, and to read, children must be able to break that code. They need to associate individual letters or groups of letters of the alphabet with the sounds they represent. Until children can decode quickly and fluently, they can only partially understand the meaning of a written passage.

While many words can be decoded readily when children know the sounds made by the letters, other words follow no such pattern. Most of these frequently used words are short ones, such as *is*, *does*, and *said*. Such words are called sight words, since children encounter them often and must learn to recognize them immediately.

Comprehension

An essential aspect of reading is understanding and making sense of the writer's words and ideas. Reading comprehension depends on the reader's ability to decode, master sight words, and relate what she is reading to things she already knows. As they read, children also need to connect to material that appears earlier in the selection and stay focused on what they are reading.

To be able to use what they learn from reading, children must remember important information, such as the main characters and events in a selection. Children who still struggle to decode find it difficult not only to understand what they read, but also to remember it. Because their efforts to figure out individual words are so exhausting, they have no resources left for understanding.

Reading Retention

Reading is one of the chief ways people acquire information and gain understanding. To retain what they read, children must organize and summarize the content and readily connect it to what they already know. Applying prior knowledge to the content makes reading more meaningful. Reading retention enables children and early adolescents to keep information in their long-term memories and to call upon and apply it in the future.

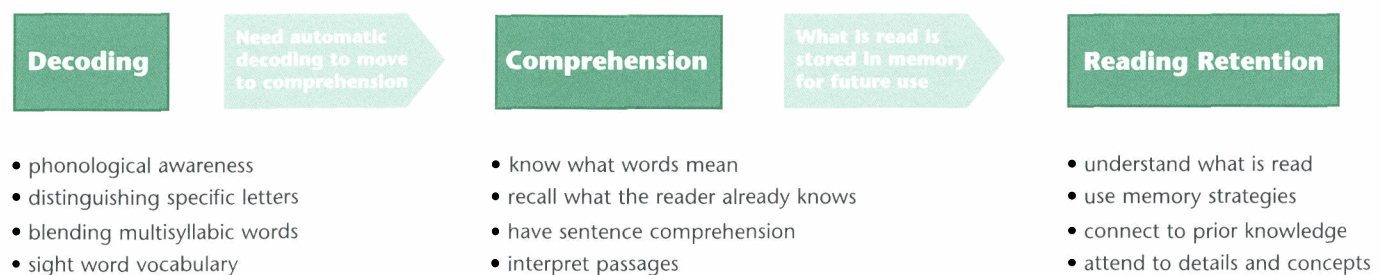


"All aspects of language, especially awareness of the speech sound system, and awareness of print and how we use written symbols for those sounds, must be taught logically, sequentially, and explicitly to children who have language learning difficulties."

—Louisa Moats, Ed.D.
Site Coordinator for the
National Institute of Child
Health and Human
Development Early
Interventions Project;
Teacher Educator

Reading Ability Diagram

This diagram offers a visual representation of the reading skills presented in the video.



Viewing Aids

The **Glossary** and **Signs of Reading Problems** explain concepts presented in the video. Refer to them while you view the video, or afterward when thinking about how you might help a particular child.

Glossary

accommodations: adjustments to tasks that work around a child's neurodevelopmental differences or weak skills; sometimes referred to as bypass strategies

active working memory:

a process in which needed ideas or parts of tasks are held together for use during an activity; in reading, this helps readers piece together what they are reading while reading it

automaticity: performing basic tasks with little or no mental effort; in reading, refers to mastering the ability to associate printed letters with their sounds quickly and accurately

demystification: the process of helping children understand—and have the terms necessary for coping with—their learning strengths and weaknesses

dysfunction: weakness in any neurodevelopmental process, for example, not having enough mental energy to complete a task

expressive language: the ways in which thoughts are communicated in speaking or writing; expressive language abilities allow children to participate in class discussions, explain their ideas orally, and communicate thoughts in writing.

fluency: reading print without hesitating or struggling over sounding out words

neurodevelopmental functions: brain-based processes needed to acquire and produce knowledge, skills, and approaches to learning

phonological awareness: attending to the sounds of speech in language, including noticing similar sounds in words, appreciating rhymes, and counting syllables

receptive language: the ways in which you take in the thoughts spoken or written by others, such as listening and reading

saliency determination: the process of deciding what is important

subvocalization: whispering under your breath to reinforce a fact, concept, or main idea

visualization: forming pictures in your mind to help recall material being read

Signs of Reading Problems

Decoding

- inability to sound out words and recognize words out of context
- confusion between letters and the sounds they represent
- slow oral reading rate (reading word-by-word) and without expression
- ignoring punctuation while reading

Comprehension

- confusion about the meaning of words and sentences
- inability to make connections among ideas in a passage
- omission of or glossing over detail
- difficulty distinguishing important information from minor detail
- lack of concentration during reading

Reading Retention

- difficulty remembering or summarizing what is read
- difficulty making connections between text and what reader already knows (prior knowledge)
- difficulty applying the content of what is read to personal experiences

Explore the Video

Observations

Go to these scenes to reinforce what you see in the video or to focus your discussion.

Decoding

1. Fantasy, a fourth grader, expresses uncertainty over both reading and spelling, a feeling common to children with weak decoding skills.



You see her:

- read in a labored, word-by-word way
- read without expression
- ignore punctuation
- describe her difficulty moving from word sounds to word meanings

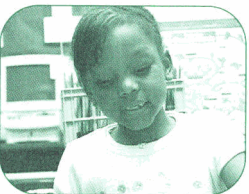
2. Mary Sarah struggles to translate letter patterns into sounds and then reblend those sounds into a word.



You see her:

- rush when sounding out the word *slate*: first guessing *stall*, *stale*, and *salt*
- point to text to help slow herself down and focus
- appear to lose the meaning of the word *slate* in the context of the passage, having expended so much mental effort on decoding the word
- describe her difficulty remembering the first part of a word she has decoded while figuring out the rest

3. Limited sight word vocabulary and attention problems hinder Brittany's decoding skills.



As Brittany reads, she:

- trips over common sight words like *a* and *they*
- carefully sounds out letters of simple words
- points to each letter within a word to help herself concentrate
- bounces and fidgets in her seat

Viewing Tips

- Watch the entire video to get a sense of the concepts and issues presented. Then rewatch the parts that interest you.
- View the video with a partner or in a small group, and discuss it. You might consider the following questions: How do problems with attention, language, and memory affect a child's ability to read? Which strategies are effective for addressing learning problems? Are there any strategies you might want to try?
- Watch the video with a child who has reading difficulties, then share your thoughts. Have siblings watch the video to gain understanding of their brother's or sister's difficulty with reading.

"Those students who are trying to get through school with insufficient language resources really have their work cut out for them, day after day, wherever they go. So much meaning is conveyed through language."

—Dr. Mel Levine

Comprehension and Retention

1. Brooks stumbles through a summary of what was just read aloud in class.



Observe him:

- glossing over his oral summary of the reading selection
- picking up on trivial details of the passage and missing main ideas

2. Alexandra describes her difficulty paying attention while reading as a “mind trip” which hinders her understanding of what she’s just read.



She reports:

- daydreaming while reading entire passages
- being unable to provide any details of what she has read
- reading superficially because she’s unable to focus

3. Henry’s decoding struggles and attention problems keep him from understanding and retaining what he’s read.



Observe him:

- reading in a slow and labored manner
- being unable to answer the teacher’s question about what he just read
- looking uncomfortable, flipping through pages without purpose
- admitting to a lack of concentration

Teacher Strategies

The techniques used by teachers in these scenes can reinforce what you see in the video or focus discussion.

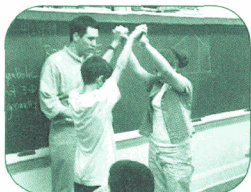
1. Ms. Yelverton, a reading specialist, uses a variety of methods to help Brittany decode words.



Her methods include:

- using books with few words, so Brittany is not overwhelmed
- encouraging Brittany to figure out difficult words through context
- breaking down the text into manageable chunks

2. Mr. Robinson uses multimodal techniques to help a variety of learners with comprehension.



He encourages children to:

- look at a pictorial handout
- build a structure out of wooden blocks on their desktop
- use their bodies and arms to build an arch

3. Ms. McClain teaches her fifth graders about how the brain interprets and remembers information in order to retain it.



To help her students understand, she:

- has a student describe what his mind does when he understands what he reads
- asks students how they file things in their memory for access later
- helps students become aware of strategies they use, like visualization, repeating back instructions, and subvocalization

"A lot of [the things I do] have to do with creating an environment where kids, despite the fact they may be worried there's something they don't do very well . . . know they are in a safe environment where they can really try their best and have success in some activity we're doing."

—Andy Robinson,
seventh grade teacher

Parent Strategies

1. Parents in the video experiment with a variety of things to build children's decoding skills.



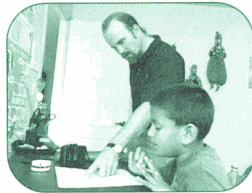
They try:

- reading aloud with their child, pointing out specific words
- getting tutors—older siblings, college students, or professional educators—to help the child practice such skills as identifying sight words and word families, and reading with expression
- using sight word flash cards
- leaving captions on the television screen so the child can compare written words to spoken ones

"My son happens to enjoy sports, so using the sports pages as a means, every morning, to read . . . is really helpful to him."

—Parent

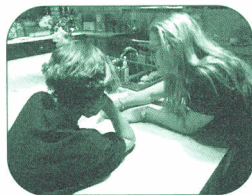
2. Nick's family sets up accommodations for comprehension and retention that build on his listening strengths.



Nick learns as he:

- watches and listens to a book on video or audiotape after he has read the book
- reads homework directions or word problems into a tape recorder and plays them back to himself
- tape records his own summaries of book chapters and plays the tape at bedtime to help retain the content

3. Other families try different things to help their children comprehend and retain what they read.



Their strategies include:

- reading aloud together—even as a child gets older—and suggesting the child visualize what's being read
- reviewing with the child what was just read and helping him interpret it

Home and School Collaboration

Living with or teaching a child with reading problems can be an emotionally charged experience. Frustration and confusion can complicate the conversation between parents and teachers about what to do. Respect for each other and open communication can reduce tension and enable parents and teachers to benefit from each other's expertise and knowledge of the child from different perspectives. Working as partners, parents, teachers, and the children themselves can inform one another about how to best address the child's needs.

Parents and Teachers Communicating about Reading

When you suspect a reading problem, schedule a parent-teacher meeting to share information about the child. The following "talking points" can help structure the discussion.

Share observations of the child's profile of reading skills and discuss where the breakdown is occurring.

What are the worries or concerns? Is the breakdown in decoding, comprehension, or retention? Do difficulties in attention, language processing, or memory seem to affect the child's reading abilities?

Identify and discuss the child's strengths and interests. How can they be used to enhance the child's interest or skills in reading? Can a child who loves pandas or dinosaurs read about that topic for a book report? Can parents or teachers find books, magazines, or Web sites about topics of interest?

Clarify the instructional program.

What reading program or text does the class use? Discuss how that approach is working for the child. Examine and evaluate accommodations, such as extra time or individualized instruction.

Acknowledge emotional reactions to the situation.

Discuss how children who experience frustration or failure as a result of reading difficulties at school may become so fearful or anxious that they give up. Some children may then turn their energy to acting out. Share strategies that have worked in the classroom and at home to help the child cope.

Discuss appropriate next steps.

Establish a plan for ongoing discussion and problem solving. How can you best advocate for the child?

When a problem with reading has been specified:

- Learn more about the reading process from the school, reading organizations, and print and Web sites. (See Resources beginning on page 19.)
- Seek assistance from colleagues, experienced parents, professional organizations, and support groups.
- Request that the school's special education teacher or learning specialist observe the child, then consult with you on strategies to use both in the classroom and at home.
- Investigate the availability of professional help from pediatricians, reading specialists, speech-language pathologists, and others.

"The quest for reading proficiency works best when there is a team effort that involves the child, the teacher, and the parent. From the earliest preschool years, mothers and fathers should be instilling the romance of the written word by reading to their children. As kids start to become independent word decoders, parents should engage in responsive reading, taking turns reading from entertaining books. Parents can also help by drilling children on new words just prior to bedtime each night."

—Dr. Mel Levine

Talking with Children about Their Strengths and Weaknesses

"In the adult world, what really counts is how strong your strengths are, not how weak your weaknesses are." —Dr. Mel Levine

Management by Profile

Demystification—helping children understand their neurodevelopmental strengths and weaknesses—is part of Management by Profile, a process developed by Dr. Levine and All Kinds of Minds for managing the education of children with differences in learning. Teachers, parents, and the children themselves participate in developing a learning plan for the child that includes strengthening of strengths, accommodations, interventions at the break-down points, and protection from humiliation.

For more information on Management by Profile, see the Management by Profile guide and the videos, *Strategies for Parents*, *Strategies for Teachers*, and *A Student Profile*.

Moments of frustration as well as exhilaration are common for children with reading problems and for the adults who work with them. Some children give up and see themselves as failures. Others may exhibit behavior problems that relate to their reading difficulties. Dr. Levine suggests using a process called demystification, which, through open discussion with supportive adults, helps children learn to put borders around their difficulties and understand that, like everyone else, they have strengths and weaknesses. This process creates a shared sense of optimism that the child and adult are working toward a common goal, and that learning problems can be successfully managed. The following suggestions can help you demystify children's reading difficulties.

Eliminate any stigma. Empathy can reduce children's frustration and anxiety about their reading difficulties. Emphasize that no one is to blame, and that you know that often they need to work harder than others to read successfully. Explain that everyone, including able readers, have differences in the way they learn. Reassure children that you will help them find ways that work for them. Share an anecdote about how you handled a learning problem or an embarrassing mistake.

Discuss strengths and interests. Help children find their strengths. Use concrete examples but avoid false praise. To a child who describes a movie well, you might say, "I like the way you can remember the details that show how funny the movie was." Identify books, videos, Web sites, or places in the community that can help children build on their strengths and interests.

Discuss areas of weakness. Use plain language to explain what aspect of reading is difficult for the child. For example, you might say, "You may have difficulty understanding what you read because your attention drifts during reading, which causes you to miss details and lose your place."

Emphasize optimism. Help children realize that they can improve—they can

work on their weaknesses and make their strengths stronger. Point out future possibilities for success given their current strengths. Help children build sense of control over their learning by encouraging them to be accountable for their own progress. A child with comprehension problems who learns to use Post-it® Notes to record important information from a reading selection can become responsible over time for remembering to use this strategy.

Identify an ally. Help children locate a mentor—a favorite teacher, a tutor, an adolescent, or a neighbor—who is available to work with and support them. Explain to children that they can help themselves by sharing with others how they learn best. Older children can explain the strategies that work for them, while younger ones may need adult support. Encourage children to be active partners with their allies.

Protect from humiliation. Help children strengthen self-esteem and maintain pride by protecting them from public humiliation related to their difference in learning. Always avoid criticizing children in public and protect them from embarrassment in front of siblings and classmates. For example, don't ask a child who has decoding problems to read aloud unfamiliar material.

Strategies to Try

You may use the strategies on the following pages to help children who are experiencing problems in decoding, comprehension, or reading retention. Many of those listed are accommodations—they work around a child’s differences by offering alternative approaches, such as learning the material through pictures before reading it. Other strategies are designed to specifically strengthen a weakness. For example, a child with memory difficulties might use memory aids, such as mnemonics, to remind himself of important information. From the strategies suggested below, select those that you and the child think might work best.

General Strategies

Play word games. Word games and puzzles are fun and also build vocabulary and word understanding. Try crossword puzzles, word bingo, Scrabble™, or Boggle™.

Read aloud everyday. Read and encourage children to read directions, labels, and signs in the classroom, at home, in the car, and at stores or shops. Have children take turns reading aloud with a classmate, parent, or sibling. Discuss in class or at home what you are reading.

Renew attention. Provide short but frequent breaks that allow children to stretch or move around. Breaks help children restore their attention.

Model reading as enjoyable. Let children see family members or teachers enjoying reading. You might informally discuss what you are reading.

Put learning to use. Help children remember by having them explain, discuss, or apply information they have just read. You might have children teach you facts or ideas they have learned from their reading, or encourage them to act out characters from their reading selections.

Decoding

Build awareness of word sounds. Play rhyming games, such as having children finish sentences by filling in a rhyming word. For example, say, “I like to run. It’s so much ____.” For a variation on this game, say a word and have the child say one that rhymes with it.

Play listening games for letter-sound correspondence. An additional set of textbooks in which children can write and make notations can be helpful.

Reinforce sight words. Use flashcards to reinforce commonly used words like *the*, *and*, *to*, and *is*.

Preview words. Call children’s attention to the decoding of difficult words, and have them pronounce the words before they read them in a passage.

Strategy Tips

Decide which strategies to try by observing the child to identify the ways in which he or she learns best.

- It may take several attempts to see positive results from one strategy. Don’t give up too soon.
- If the first few strategies you try do not improve the child’s skills, try others.
- Most of these strategies can be adapted for use with different age groups.

"What I'm hearing [from parents] is that one of the secrets is to find a key that fits in the lock, that fits the child. . . . And different kids have different locks. . . that are going to get them into a reading groove."

—Dr. Mel Levine

"It's okay to take a risk because that's the way we learn. . . I always use that phrase, any time we're doing almost anything. And [the children] are really comfortable with it, and it really works."

—Michelle Jones,
second grade teacher

Play listening games for blending and segmenting sounds. Have a child say one-syllable words such as *snow* and *ball*, then blend them together to say the compound word *snowball*. Next, have the child break down a multisyllable word like *caterpillar*, saying it slowly and clapping or tapping a finger for each syllable.

Teach spelling. Have children practice writing and spelling words that they are learning to decode, focusing on the connection between the letters they are writing and the sounds these letters make.

Encourage independent reading. Give children ample opportunity to read books that match their independent reading levels. When a child can decode 95 percent of the words in the book, she is reading at the appropriate level.

Involve several pathways. Read aloud together so children can see and hear the words being read. Use books on tape that allow children to read as they listen. Sing a song that uses words with the sounds that children are working on.

Emphasize word families. Have children collect word families, such as words that end in *-ight* or *-ash*. Use them in a song or a rap for children to sing together.

Write using word families. Encourage children to write stories or poems using words in word families, such as *-op* (*mop, hop, stop, pop*), that they are working on. Children might underline or highlight the repetitive pattern. Ask children to read their stories or poems aloud to you or to each other.

Teach rules. Some children benefit from learning rules about decoding (e.g., when there are two vowels together in a word, the first vowel often says its name and the second one is silent). Once children have learned the rule for a vowel combination, remind them to follow it when they encounter that vowel combination in their reading.

Comprehension

Foster decoding abilities. Provide opportunities for children to become fluent in their decoding of words, so they can focus on the meaning of what they read, rather than the decoding of itself.

Use movement. Play charades to act out words. This activity can build vocabulary and word understanding.

Build on students' knowledge. Select reading topics that enhance subject matter previously covered in school or that reflect a child's interests. Encourage children to develop expertise in a subject and to read different types of texts about that subject, such as articles, books, and online materials.

Connect yesterday's reading to today's. Continue a story over several days. Have children make predictions about what they think will happen, then compare those predictions to what actually happens in the story.

Use self-questioning strategies. Have children develop a list of questions to answer after reading. These questions and answers can become the basis of classroom, small group, or parent-child discussions.

Connect reading to what children know. Have children discuss what they already know about a topic before reading. Then have them list the things they would like to learn about the topic, and make predictions about whether the assigned reading will include these things or not.

Help children get started. Read the first part of a story or passage to or with the child. Siblings and classmates can also participate by taking turns reading paragraphs or short sections.

Develop interest in words and concepts. Have children keep track of the times they see, hear, or use a new vocabulary word. (How many times can they find the word in a day or a week?) Encourage children to report their observations to the family or class.

Engage several pathways. Use pictures and diagrams to explain concepts; use stories on tape or tell stories; and encourage children to interpret stories through drawings, models, or other constructions.

Focus on important information. Before children begin reading challenging material, offer an outline of the key ideas or help them make diagrams or charts that capture key concepts as they read.

Preview difficult vocabulary. Offer children a glossary of selection-related words and concepts to use while reading.

Read in stages. Break lengthy passages into short segments. Ask children to summarize each section as soon as they finish reading it, or have them write a brief summary for themselves at the end of each section.

Select a strategy. Before children begin reading, have them write down the reading comprehension strategy they plan to use. They might choose guiding questions, highlighting or underlining important details, writing comments in the margin, or summarizing each paragraph.

Help children locate main ideas and important details. Suggest that they think about the “5 Ws” as they read: Who? What? When? Where? Why? Post these questions on a wall or have children write them on a sheet of paper they keep nearby or use as a bookmark.

Encourage collaborative reading activities. Children who are all reading the same book might meet in small groups—or with a sibling or friend—to discuss what they have read, plan an oral report, design a mural, or work on a skit related to their reading.

Focus attention by using reading organizers. Mapping techniques and organizers such as the story outline on the right help children become familiar with the structure of stories and keep track of story elements as they read.

“Once I’ve read something, I put it into a category in my mind to understand it better.”

—Christina,
fifth grade student

Title: _____
Setting: _____
Characters: _____
Problem: _____
Event 1: _____
Event 2: _____
Event 3: _____
Event 4: _____
Solution: _____

Reading Retention

Use rereading for remembering. Teach children how to highlight or underline as they read, then encourage them to reread what they have underlined. Have children separate reading a passage for meaning from rereading the same passage for remembering.

Model the processes you use to remember. Describe a picture you create in your mind to help you understand and remember what you read. Or show children how you remember what you read by making connections between the text and what you already know about the topic.

Build elaboration skills. Ask children questions that encourage them to provide detailed information or describe pertinent facts from the reading in a more complex way.

Find the reading pathway that works. Children might draw diagrams, storyboards, or timelines; record their own summaries into a tape recorder; act out the information; or use a combination of pathways.

Suggest techniques for remembering. Use memory aids called mnemonics to help children remind themselves of information. One example is H.O.M.E.S., in which each letter represents one of the Great Lakes—Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. Other memory aids might include generating questions, using mental imagery, and categorizing what is read.

Summarize and review. Have children recap short passages or chapters, possibly recording key ideas on Post-it™ Notes or reading them into a tape recorder. Continue a story over several days so children can summarize what happened each day, then recall this information before the next reading.

Build reading self-awareness. Increase children's awareness of reading strategies that they already use. Do they visualize (form pictures in their minds while they read) or subvocalize (whisper important information under their breath)? Encourage them to build on their own preferred strategies.

Check what children remember. Immediately after reading, ask such questions as, "What did you just learn?" or "What was important about what you read?"

Use synonym/antonym/homonym activities. Introduce activities that require children to think about words that are the same, opposite, or have the same sound but a different meaning.

Create dictionaries. Have children develop a thesaurus or synonym dictionary that can be added to and used to enrich their speaking and writing.

Teach sentence types. Provide examples for sentences that serve the following purposes: define, restate, provide an example, compare/contrast, describe, summarize, and make an association. Ask children to find examples in their books.

For more strategies to address problems with reading, refer to the *Attention, Memory, and Language* videos and guides in this library.

Background on Reading

Teaching children to read can be one of the most rewarding—and challenging—tasks parents and teachers face. While many children seem to learn to read easily, others have problems that start when they are young and worsen as they grow older.

Many of these children struggle through school and graduate with reading and comprehension skills so poor they can't cope with college level work. Others drop out. But the news isn't all bad: Long-term studies show that 90 to 95 percent of children who experience problems with reading can overcome their difficulties if they receive help at early ages.

Most teachers and parents are in agreement that children want to learn to read. But what takes some children from that point to independent reading of treasured stories and others to an ongoing struggle to read and understand simple sentences has sparked decades of research and debate that continues today.

The debate usually focuses on the best way to teach reading, either through phonics—a method that teaches children the relationship between sounds and letters—or through whole language—an approach that encourages students to figure out unfamiliar words by a story's plot, nearby known words, or pictures. The roots of this reading debate stretch back to colonial times when children learned what letters sounded like alone and together and deciphered new words with that knowledge. Called code-emphasis, this method makes students phonemically aware, or able to recognize that a word is made up of individual sounds. It is the basis of phonics.

Starting in the 1920s, the emphasis slowly shifted away from sounding out words to a "look-say" approach, with students recognizing words in their entirety. Textbooks using this method, especially those featuring Dick and Jane, were popular through the 1950s and early 1960s.

After years of "look-say," however, reading achievement test scores dropped. Harvard University reading expert Dr. Jeanne Chall took an unpopular stance in her 1967 book *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* by calling for a return to phonics. Many schools followed her advice, but in the 1980s, a new idea for promoting literacy took root: Whole language. Respected researchers like Dr. Kenneth S. Goodman posited that reading was intuitive and students could figure out unknown words in the context of a story. Students would learn naturally, by being immersed in fine literature. Phonics, with its emphasis on drilling, was perceived as rote and unimaginative.

"The whole debate thing is nonsense," says Dr. G. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "If you just teach phonics and you teach it too long, you won't produce a child who loves to read. If you just teach the text and hope they'll pick it up on their own, you won't, in most readers, instill those decoding skills that serve as the gateway to literature."

Currently, many school districts—including the entire state of California—have decided once again to include phonics in their reading instruction. In April 2000, national experts reviewed 34 years of research on reading and indicated that students were more successful if they used a skills-based, or phonics, approach. The panel said students should be explicitly taught sounds and their meanings in a logically planned sequence—not simply break apart words they happen to come

across in books. Students with reading problems, meanwhile, should be taught to convert letters into phonemes, or individual sound units, and then blend them to form words—a method called synthetic phonics instruction. Despite the strong evidence for a skills-based approach, the panel noted that a combination of methods worked best, including introducing students to literature early on and having students read aloud and be given feedback, a process called guided reading.

Whichever teaching methods are used, some children will experience difficulties learning to read. In grades two and three, children acquire fluency in reading. In grades four through eight, they read to learn, relate print to ideas, read material with more than one viewpoint and find reading can be more efficient than listening. Any parent or teacher who watches a child learn to read knows that how they actually acquire those skills is a complex process. Reading researcher Dr. Marilyn Adams says explicit instruction in sound-symbol relationships, or phonics, is critical for helping struggling children to read. But along with the national panel, Dr. Adams supports the importance of literature—of the text itself.

Some educators continue to label struggling students as unmotivated or uninterested in reading. Many students are diagnosed with dyslexia—a language-based difficulty that learning specialist Priscilla Vail says translates into difficulty with numbers, letters, learning words by sight, and following step-by-step directions.

Dr. Mel Levine, of All Kinds of Minds, conceptualizes reading as comprising three subskills: decoding, comprehension, and reading retention. Neurodevelopmental functions affect a child's ability to acquire and use these reading subskills. Key functions affecting reading include

attention, language, memory, and higher order cognition.

Using precise descriptions about brain functions is becoming increasingly important, as brain research breaks down global terms that used to describe learning difficulties. While no one knows exactly what causes problems with reading, researchers like Yale University pediatrician Dr. Sally Shaywitz are beginning to pinpoint the areas of the brain that are activated by certain functions, for instance when a person reads a story aloud. Dr. Shaywitz and her associates have done extensive research on the brain, using a more sophisticated version of the magnetic resonance imagers found in many hospitals.

The work of Dr. Shaywitz and others has helped redefine the way people think about reading. Instead of a visual problem that had people reversing letters, her work showed that the connection in the brain that translates print into language doesn't work well in people with language-based difficulties.

Regardless of a child's reading problem, research indicates that the earlier children are reached, the easier it is to place them on the path to becoming successful readers. Reading researcher Dr. Joseph K. Torgesen of Florida State University, has written extensively on the need to better identify reading problems early. He notes, "The poor first-grade reader almost invariably continues to be a poor reader." By fifth grade, children who struggle with language skills are, on average, three years behind their classmates.

Still, it's not too late for those children who fall behind early to catch up. If a child's strengths and weaknesses are identified, he or she can be taught to work around or compensate for weaknesses, whether it involves extra emphasis on sounding out letters or reading aloud to gain fluency. Most of all, research shows that with intensive one-on-one instruction in

Beyond Labeling

Instead of labeling struggling students, Dr. Levine stresses that every child's mind works differently. His approach identifies areas that need strengthening by looking at the neurodevelopmental profile of a child in eight areas:

- Concentrating and paying attention
- Learning information in order
- Understanding spatial relationships, such as using images to remember things
- Ability to articulate and understand language
- Using motor skill, such as the ability to type on a keyboard
- Memory
- Social relationships
- Ability to solve problems and think creatively

elementary or middle school and help that stresses the basic phonetic elements of words, children can catch up with their peers. This works during these years because students are still in the process of learning the skills that will make them good readers.

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Torgesen, Joseph K. "Catch Them Before They Fail." *American Educator* (Spring/Summer 1998).

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Books

Hall, Susan L., and Louisa C. Moats. *Straight Talk About Reading*. Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books, 1998.

Web Sites

www.allkindsofminds.org "Our Perspective, A Neurodevelopmental View."

www.ncld.org "Keys to Successful Learning: A National Summit on Research in Learning Disabilities."

Resources

Below is a list of resources that offers more information on a range of issues regarding reading and the school-age child.

Web Sites

All Kinds of Minds

www.allkindsofminds.org Explores the reading process and its neurodevelopmental underpinnings, including memory and attention. The Library section of the site includes case studies and articles such as "The Impeding of Reading" by Dr. Mel Levine. The site's LearningBase offers further guidance and references for teachers and parents, including the feature "Mastering the Challenges of Reading."

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication (ERIC/REC)

http://eric.indiana.edu Contains bibliographies useful to parents and educators on a full range of reading topics. Its Family Literacy Center publishes an audio-journal with suggestions for involving children in reading, book recommendations, and a read-along story accompanied by a story tape. A free sample can be requested by calling (800) 759-4723 or (812) 855-5847.

Hello Friend/Ennis William Cosby Foundation

www.hellofriend.org Provides information for teachers and families about learning and learning differences; offers resources and links for individuals who wish to learn more about learning differences.

International Reading Association

www.reading.org Offers resources for improving the quality of reading instruction; publishes the academic journal *Reading Research Quarterly*.

International Dyslexia Association

www.iterdys.org (Formerly the Orton Dyslexia Society) Gives information to support parents and professionals; publishes the scholarly research journal *Annals of Dyslexia*.

The Internet Public Library Youth Division—Children's Literature

www.ipl.org/youth Fun, educational activities for children and recommended reading; includes resources about reading issues for both parents and teachers.

LD Online

www.ldonline.org Links to extensive resources on the topic of reading; offers teaching and parenting tips on accommodations and interventions for children with various reading abilities. The site's LD in Depth section contains a full archive of articles about reading skills.

Reading Initiatives—National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

www.nih.gov/nichd/html/about_nichd.html Describes reading programs sponsored by this research unit of the National Institutes of Health.

Schwab Learning

www.schwablearning.org Offers families information for identifying and managing differences in learning and resources for connecting with others; provides information in both Spanish and English.

Special Education Resources on the Internet (SERI)—Overviews of the Research

www.greenwoodinstitute.org/roadmap/1overview.html Lists recently published overviews of current research on reading.

Articles and Pamphlets

American Educator, Spring/Summer 1998.

This entire journal issue is devoted to the topic of reading. The issue has articles written by researchers and practitioners, including Marilyn J. Adams, "The Elusive Phoneme"; I. L. Beck et al., "Getting at the Meaning"; Louisa Moats, "Teaching Decoding"; and Joseph Torgesen, "Catch them Before They Fall." Archived articles are online at <http://aft.org/publications/InternationalDyslexiaAssociation>

Hagin, Rosa A., and Lynn Waterhouse.

Teaching Reading: Definitions of Commonly Used Terms. Defines reading instruction terms used by educators. This 17-page booklet can be ordered through the Resources section of the Learning Disabilities Association Web site at www.ldanatl.org/

National Center for Learning Disabilities.

Learning to Read, Reading to Learn.

Several articles from this 1996 information kit are posted online at www.cec.sped.org/eric/ec/readlist.htm, including "Principles for Learning to Read" and "Tips for Parents and Teachers."

National Research Council. **Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.**

Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998. This landmark report summarizes the research on early reading development; describes how reading develops and how instruction should proceed. The report is available by calling (800) 624-6242; entire report also available at www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/prdyc

Books

Adams, Marilyn Jager. **Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print.**

Champaign, IL: Bradford Books, 1994. Author proposes using phonics together with the whole language approach to teach reading, then reviews the process involved in skillful reading, issues surrounding the acquisition of those skills, and implications for teachers.

Hall, Susan L., and Louisa Moats. **Straight Talk about Reading: How Parents Can Make a Difference During the Early Years.**

Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books, 1998. Comprehensive guide for parents about research-based practices in teaching reading; includes advice on how to advocate for quality reading programs in schools.

Honig, Bill et al. **Teaching Reading: Sourcebook for Kindergarten through Eighth Grade.**

Novato, CA: Academic Therapy Publications, 2000. Offers a wealth of strategies and explicit instruction tips for teaching reading.

Hurford, Daphne M. **To Read or Not to Read: Answers to All Your Questions about Dyslexia.**

New York: Scribner, 1998. Written for parents, this award-winning book explains what it is like to live with dyslexia through stories of well-known individuals with dyslexia, such as Winston Churchill and Nelson Rockefeller; also evaluates the different educational programs and teaching methods available.

Leonhardt, Mary. **99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading: And 100 Books They'll Love.**

New York: Crown Publishing, 1997. Offers simple, practical tips to encourage children of all ages and reading abilities to learn to love reading. A separate section identifies books for a range of readers.

Levine, Melvin D. **A Mind at a Time.** New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002. Familiarizes the general public with the author's eight constructs (called "capabilities" in the book); provides real life stories of children, adolescents, and adults who have struggled with their neurodevelopmental profiles. The book also describes systematic approaches to dealing with differences in learning, and it concludes with chapters on what ideal homes and schools should be doing to foster the optimal development of all kinds of minds.

Levine, Melvin D. **Developmental Variations and Learning Disorders.** 2d ed.

Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1998. Offers comprehensive information about developmental variations in children that can lead to learning difficulties, and explores research from different disciplines; useful for clinicians, educators, and parents alike.

Levine, Melvin D. **Educational Care.** 2d ed.

Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 2002. Covers key themes in academic performance. The book is intended to be a practical guide to the understanding and collaborative management of differences in learning. For each topic there are recommendations regarding what needs to be done at home and also in school to help a struggling child or adolescent succeed. Chapter 6 covers the topic of reading development. General management strategies for the struggling reader are also included.

Levine, Melvin D. **The Myth of Laziness.**

New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002. Focusing mainly on students between the ages of 11 and 15, this book deals with the understanding of "seemingly lazy kids." Author describes the many possible mechanisms underlying output failure or low productivity in school; covers, among other possibilities, the role of weak attention controls, memory shortcomings, language gaps, and organizational problems. Real case material is presented and there are abundant suggestions for managing output problems.

Olivier, Carolyn, and Rosemary F. Bowler.

Learning to Learn. New York: Fireside, 1996.

Very readable book for those suspecting a child has language-based learning problems and/or delayed reading skills; techniques shared are those from Landmark College, a school for students with learning problems.

Pressley, Michael. **Best Practices in Literacy Instruction.** New York: Guilford Press, 1998.

Helpful to teachers and parents both, this book explores the great debate about reading instruction; defines the whole-language and skills-based approaches to literacy and urges balance.

Vail, Priscilla L. **Common Ground: Whole Language & Phonics Working Together.**

Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press, 1991. Shows teachers how these two methods of learning language can and should work together to strengthen reading instruction.

Audio and Videotapes

All Kinds of Minds Institute. **The Fright and the Plight When They're Not Reading Right (audio)**. Part of the *Reaching Minds* audiotape series. In this tape, Drs. Mel Levine and Priscilla L. Vail discuss students' struggles with reading and offer advice and strategies. Ordering information is online at www.allkindsofminds.org

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. **When Stars Read (video)**. Produced in 1999, this video addresses reading failure and the potential for success. A complimentary copy can be ordered by calling (800) 370-2943.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. **Books on Tape (audio)**. Provides over 75,000 titles on audiotape with a catalog available online at www.rfbd.org or by phone at (800) 221-4792. This group also publishes the free *Learning through Listening: An Informational Guide for Students with Learning Disabilities*, which shows students how recorded books can help them reach their educational and career goals; a companion guide for educators and parents is also available.

Resources for Children and Adolescents

Kids Only Info—Dyslexia

www.interdys.org/kidsinfo.stm Offers basic facts, definitions, homework tips, software programs, and an "ask the expert" feature. The site has separate sections for kids ages 6–8, 9–11, and 12–15.

LD Online—KidZone

www.ldonline.org/kidzone Includes an interactive reading activity that simulates what it is like to have a reading disability; also includes self-advocacy tips, book lists, and an art gallery.

Teens Helping Teens

www.ldteens.org Site designed by young teens with dyslexia to help each other understand their difficulties in school.

Barrie, Barbara. **Adam Zigzag**. New York: Delacorte Press, 1994. Novel about a teenage boy growing up with reading difficulties.

Betancourt, Jeanne. **My Name is Brain/Brian**. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1993. About a boy learning to respect his own intelligence during his sixth-grade year.

Levine, Melvin D. **All Kinds of Minds**.

Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1993. Written for children ages 7–11, this book outlines the neurodevelopmental underpinnings of learning differences, including weak reading skills, and their effect on life at home and at school.

Levine, Melvin D. **Keeping A Head in**

School. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1990. Helps children ages 11 and older understand and appreciate their own distinct learning profiles; offers different ways to bypass or strengthen weaker reading functions.

Levine, Melvin D. **The Language Parts**

Catalog. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1999. Helps adolescents 12 years and older understand the various parts of language and the roles language plays in school and in social life. The book is especially useful in trying to demystify students with language dysfunctions. Readers who believe they have weak language functions may "send away" for replacement parts. Students also are given specific remedial techniques to try while waiting for their "parts" to arrive in the mail.

Levine, Melvin D., Carl Swartz, and Melissa Wakely. **The Mind That's Mine**. Helps young children discover what goes on inside their brains, when they are thinking and learning; available at: www.allkindsofminds.org

Media Projects, Inc., Dallas TX. **We're Not**

Stupid: Living with a Learning Disability (video). A former Landmark School student filmed and produced this documentary about her classmates' experiences with dyslexia. For information, call (214) 826-3869 or visit www.mediaprojects.org

Credits

The *Developing Minds* video library is produced by the Educational Programming and Outreach department, Special Telecommunications Services division of the WGBH Educational Foundation.

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