

Teaching Beginning Reading Skills, Grade K

Introduction

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If young students are to become successful readers, they must have systematic and explicit instruction in the foundational skills and strategies that support beginning reading. The most important of these skills are:

- Awareness of the forms and functions of print—print awareness.
- An understanding of the relationships that exist between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language—the alphabetic principle.
- The ability to decode words by blending sounds.
- The ability to recognize high-frequency words.
- The ability to associate a printed word with its meaning—word recognition.

The teaching practices shown and described in this course provide the strategies you'll need to help your students become successful readers by the end of kindergarten. The teaching examples illustrate the progression over the kindergarten year that takes the students from understanding concepts of print to being able to read **Decodable Books** on their own.

The instructional strategies you will see in this course address Common Core State Standards and share the following research-based principles:

- Principle 1: The best predictors of children's early reading success include measures of print awareness (Lonigan, 2004).
- Principle 2: Helping children acquire skills in blending is an important part of early reading instruction. Familiarizing children early on with a particular procedure for blending can be quite valuable (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000).
- Principle 3: Knowledge of high-frequency words is necessary for fluent reading (Blevins, 1998).
- Principle 4: Word recognition is central to reading acquisition (Stanovich, 1991).

This course represents an overview of the kindergarten reading instruction found in **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** For a more detailed treatment of the essential elements reviewed in this course, see the following kindergarten courses: *The Alphabetic Principle, Grade K*; *Phonemic Awareness, Grade K*; and *Comprehension, Grades K-1*.

Teaching Example 1

In Teaching Example 1, Debi Quinney and her class review the essential skills the students have been introduced to and need to acquire in order to read. The students are given many opportunities daily to practice and sharpen these skills so that by the end of the year, they are able to successfully apply the skills and read *Decodable Books*. The students:

- Review the alphabet by singing the alphabet song and discussing specific letters.
- Discuss the purpose of learning the alphabet.

- Work on book and print awareness by focusing on the conventions of books and print (organization, structure, and so on).
- Reinforce knowledge of letter formation by focusing on the types of strokes writers use to make different letters.
- Review the purpose of learning about sounds, letters, and print. Mrs. Quinney demonstrates how phonics instruction works using **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** resources and teaching techniques. **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** are designed to provide teachers with all the tools they need to implement effective phonics instruction as part of the comprehensive reading program.

Alphabetic Knowledge and Print Awareness

Once they know the alphabetic principle, students can accurately and automatically recognize familiar words, as well as decode any unfamiliar words they encounter as they read. In short, knowledge of the alphabetic principle has a significant impact on students' abilities to read fluently and with comprehension. Poorly developed knowledge of the alphabetic principle, on the other hand, is the most pervasive cause of reading difficulty. If students cannot understand and apply the alphabetic principle, they will find word recognition difficult; this, in turn, will impede their reading comprehension (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998).

Print awareness refers to students' knowledge of the organization and basic features of print. Print awareness is the first step to awareness of letter shapes, names, sounds, and, eventually, words (International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998).

The most important way that students develop print awareness is by participating in frequent and interactive oral reading. These experiences:

- Reinforce students' knowledge of the shapes and names of all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- Help them become aware of how reading "works"—that they should follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page.
- Help them learn to distinguish letters from words and words from the spaces that separate them.
- Help them learn that words, and not pictures, carry the message of a story.

Teaching Example 2

In this teaching example, Mrs. Quinney and the class use the **Pickled Peppers Big Book** and the **Pocket Chart Word Cards** to focus more closely on individual words and word order. These activities help students recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters. Although seasoned readers take this relationship for granted, emergent readers will probably not grasp it immediately.

Focusing on Words in Print

Mrs. Quinney starts the activity by reading a song in the **Big Book**. The repetition inherent in the song helps the students learn and remember the words quickly. This type of repetitive text lends itself to the word order activity that follows as the students readily remember the words.

Throughout the activity, Mrs. Quinney makes a point of tracking the words in the book with her finger. This reinforces the idea that each word spoken has a written counterpart.

The **Pocket Chart** activity allows the students to see the words in isolation as they are put on the chart. This, too, reinforces the notion that the group of letters makes up a specific word with a specific sound and meaning. It is

sometimes hard for young students to distinguish word boundaries in connected text; the **Pocket Chart** makes these boundaries very clear. It also helps students see the spaces between words.

Teaching Example 3

Mrs. Quinney introduces students to **Pre-Decodable Books**. The purpose of these books is to introduce students to high-frequency words—words that appear frequently in text. These are generally function words such as prepositions (*of, in, on*, and so on), conjunctions (*and, but, as, because*, and so on), and articles (*a, an, the*), and are necessary for building sentences. The **Pre-Decodable Books** afford students extensive practice in reading high-frequency words in text by sight. Words other than the high-frequency words are presented as rebus pictures. Together, the high-frequency words and the rebus pictures tell a story and give students practice reading from top to bottom and left to right.

Reading a Pre-Decodable Book

In introducing and reading the **Pre-Decodable Book**, Mrs. Quinney follows an instructional routine outlined in **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!**. By using a routine to deliver this instruction, she enables the students to concentrate on the content of the **Pre-Decodable Book** rather than the method of presentation. Routines give students a comfort zone in which to try out new knowledge.

The students are asked to reread this book several times. First the teacher reads it aloud, and then the class reads it aloud. Mrs. Quinney follows this by asking individual students to read the story aloud from start to finish. Finally, students partner-read the book with each other. All of this repetition is designed specifically to give students enough exposure to cement their learning of the target high-frequency word—in this case, *the*.

Teaching Example 4

Helping students acquire skills in blending is an important part of early reading instruction. Familiarizing students with a particular procedure for blending early on can be quite valuable (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000).

In this example, Mrs. Quinney introduces students to blending. Blending will become the most important decoding skill the students learn. By learning to associate the sounds of the language with their letters, students are able to produce the sounds represented by the printed word. Since their speaking vocabulary is much more advanced than their reading vocabulary, once students are able to produce the sounds, they are more likely to recognize and comprehend the word.

Blending

Blending is the cornerstone of phonics instruction. By translating the printed word into discernable speech sounds, the reader can identify words. Once students become accomplished at blending, they can concentrate on comprehending the text. If students never become fluent at blending or decoding in general, they will not have the tools they need to concentrate on meaning.

As with reading the **Pre-Decodable Books**, Mrs. Quinney follows a prescribed instructional routine in the introduction of new sound/letter correspondences and in blending instruction. Once the routine is established, students can concentrate all their energy on learning to blend new sound/letter correspondences. It also frees the teacher to concentrate on the students' acquisition of the skill, rather than on creating new modes of delivery.

The introduction of sound/letter correspondences in **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** follows a specific sequence. The most commonly used sound/letter correspondences are introduced early so students can read many words right from the beginning. For example, when students have learned the correspondences /s/, /m/, /a/, /t/, /h/, /p/, /i/, /l/, and /n/, they can read all of these words by blending sounds of the letters together: *am, Sam, sat, map, mat, ham, hat, pat, Pam, pan, tan, tap, man, it, in, sit, sip, hit, hip, pit, tip, Tim, and tin*.

Students enjoy blending—they know that with each new sound/letter correspondence they learn, they are able to read more and more words.

Teaching Example 5

Mrs. Quinney and the class demonstrate the most important result of phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle instruction—the students can read. Because it is important for students to practice the decoding skills they are learning on connected texts, their first experience in reading is with **Decodable Books**. **Decodable Books** are phonetically controlled to expose students to the phonic element being introduced in each lesson.

Reading a *Decodable Book*

Mrs. Quinney again follows a recommended instructional routine in teaching the **Decodable Books**. The students become used to this routine and can concentrate on reading the words.

Because practice in reading introduced sound/letter correspondences is the purpose of the **Decodable Books**, less emphasis is put on comprehension than on decoding. However, students are still expected to understand what they have read and to retell the story. In addition, Mrs. Quinney models and prompts the use of essential reading strategies; she asks the students to browse the book before beginning to read and then asks them to predict what they think the story might be about. These are strategies that good readers use. Students are formally introduced to reading strategies in the Reading and Responding section of **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** and can use these strategies as they read **Decodable Books**.