

Phonics and Fluency, Grades 2-3

Introduction

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Second grade is a pivotal year for most students. They have learned a tremendous amount about reading in grade 1, which is essential for their success in grade 2 and beyond. Unfortunately, much of what students learn in first grade can seemingly be forgotten over the summer. Therefore, it is essential to start second grade with a thorough review of decoding skills and strategies.

If students are to succeed in school, they must become fluent readers. In order to gain fluency, they need to be able to decode words confidently and automatically.

In this course, you will visit the classroom of second grade teachers Lisa Coronado and Debra Hunter. Both of these teachers conduct a systematic review of the phonics elements introduced in first grade. By doing this, they not only refresh their students' memories, but they can also assess each student's understanding of the alphabetic principle and how it works both in reading and writing.

Both Mrs. Coronado and Ms. Hunter use the instructional routines presented in *Open Court Reading* and *SRA Imagine It!*. These routines allow students to concentrate fully on reviewing critical decoding skills rather than on new activities for reviewing them. By providing continuous support and familiar lesson formats, Mrs. Coronado and Ms. Hunter create a classroom environment that is non-threatening and supportive.

Teaching Example 1

In Teaching Example 1, Mrs. Coronado demonstrates a review of the *Sound/Spelling Cards*—a critical component of decoding instruction. Students are encouraged to contribute what they remember about the cards from first grade, and the teacher leads the class through a thorough review of details about the cards and how they are used to support reading and spelling throughout the day.

Reviewing Sound/Spelling Cards

The purpose of the *Sound/Spelling Cards* is to remind students of the sounds of English and their spellings. The name of the picture on each card contains the target sound—at the beginning of the word for the consonants, and in the middle of the word for the short vowels. Variant vowels are represented most frequently in the medial or final position. In addition, the picture associates a sound with an action. This association is introduced through an interactive story in which the pictured object or character "makes" the sound. These cards are a resource for students, helping them to remember sound/spelling associations in both reading and writing.

There are several important points that Mrs. Coronado brings out during the review of the *Sound/Spelling Cards*. She makes sure her students:

- See the spelling or spellings on the *Sound/Spelling Card* and on the board or an overhead.
- Hear the sound used in isolation and in words. The sound is related to the picture and the action pictured on the *Sound/Spelling Card*.
- Say the sound.
- Write the spelling(s) for the sound.

In addition, Mrs. Coronado makes sure her students remember the special devices contained on the cards to help them use the cards effectively.

Teaching Example 2

Teaching Example 2 demonstrates a review of the blending techniques the students learned in first grade. Mrs. Coronado reviews both sound-by-sound and whole-word blending, making sure that the students know the strategies and techniques involved with decoding. This helps those students who may be new to the class or may have forgotten this during the summer. The goal in second grade is to remind the students of the decoding strategy, which they should use only when they come to words they can't read automatically.

Sound-by-Sound and Whole-Word Blending

Blending teaches students a strategy for figuring out unfamiliar words. Initially, students will be blending sound-by-sound. Ultimately, they will sound and blend only those words that they cannot read. Eventually, the blending process will become quick and automatic for them. As Mrs. Coronado conducts the review of the sounds and spellings, she assumes nothing about what her students have learned in the past or what they remember. She begins the review of the blending procedure with sound-by-sound blending in order to give students maximum support. In this way, those students who either haven't learned how to blend or have forgotten how to use the blending strategy are assured of success. As this is a review for most of her students, Mrs. Coronado quickly progresses to whole-word blending. If any student is having difficulty, she is always able to drop back to sound-by-sound blending during Workshop to address the student's specific needs.

As part of the blending process, Mrs. Coronado reviews what her students have learned by challenging them to find specific words on the word lines. By using the Developing Oral Language activities, she can be assured that her students know the meanings of the words presented in the blending activity and they can read them.

Teaching Example 3

In Teaching Example 3, Mrs. Coronado continues with explicit support for blending, applying it to long-vowel spellings, which can be challenging even for second grade students. Mrs. Coronado initially drops back to sound-by-sound blending to review words with these sounds and spellings, but quickly moves her students back to whole-word blending. She then moves on to simply reading the words. This progression effectively scaffolds students' understanding of blending and dealing with words that have more complex spellings.

Blending Long Vowels

Long-vowel spellings pose many challenges for novice readers. While most of the consonant sounds and the short-vowel sounds have only one spelling, each of the long-vowel sounds has multiple spellings. Students need to be aware of each of the spellings so that they can recognize them instantly. In addition, they now need to distinguish between the pronunciation of the short and the long spellings of the vowel sounds.

In addition to the review of the long-vowel spellings, Mrs. Coronado makes sure her students understand how to decode multisyllabic words. One of the aspects of reading that can be daunting to new readers is simply the length of some of the words they encounter. By applying the decoding strategies to multisyllabic words, Mrs. Coronado shows her students that they have the tools they need to decode most words, no matter the length.

Although the primary goal of the blending exercises is to review decoding skills, Mrs. Coronado makes sure at each step that her students understand the words they are blending by asking them to use the words in sentences and then to extend the sentences. This quick but effective activity helps students demonstrate their understanding of the words' meanings; it also encourages them to extend their sentences to make them more comprehensive and interesting. This is a skill they will use extensively in their writing.

Finally, Mrs. Coronado uses the sentences students blend to incorporate a quick review of grammar, mechanics, and word structure development by pointing out such things as capitalization, end punctuation, contractions, and inflectional endings.

Teaching Example 4

Teaching Example 4 illustrates how fluency is reached through reading practice. Students read a **Decodable Book** as a class and reread the book with a partner. Each time students practice, they have a new opportunity to use decoding strategies (with varying amounts of support); multiple readings build fluency.

Reading a Decodable Text

The purpose of decodable text is to provide students with immediate practice in reading connected text that contains the phonic elements they are learning or reviewing. By applying their growing knowledge of words and phonic elements, students can read these simple, engaging stories themselves and thereby experience early success with reading.

As with other segments of the blending lessons, Mrs. Coronado follows the routine outlined for reading a **Decodable**. In this way, students:

- Review their understanding of how books work by identifying the title of the book, the author, and the illustrator. Mrs. Coronado makes sure they understand what each of those words means and can explain what, for example, an illustrator does.
- Automatically browse the story before reading. This is a habit that will enhance students' understanding of anything they are about to read. By identifying interesting, new, confusing, or unfamiliar elements before beginning to read, students have the advantage of clarifying in advance, so that when they come to these elements, they know what they mean. Browsing also helps them recognize that they bring background knowledge to the selection.
- Read each page of the story silently. This is the first reading.
- Read each page aloud.

Mrs. Coronado helps the process by making sure:

- Difficult words are blended (although most words are simply read).
- Students have anything confusing clarified before they go on.
- Her questions are pertinent and can be answered specifically from the text. She has her students point to the words that answer the questions.
- Students can retell the story in their own words.

The two major goals in using decodable text are to give students practice with reviewed phonic elements and to build fluency. In order to build fluency, the students reread each **Decodable** several times. They:

- Read each page silently.
- Reread the page out loud.
- Read it again with a partner.
- Read it several times with a partner in Workshop.

Teaching Example 5

Teaching Example 5 highlights dictation and spelling lessons, which are the reciprocal process to decoding. When students decode words and sentences, they are focusing on spellings and connecting the sounds to the spellings. Dictation is encoding; students focus on breaking the word into the sounds and identify the corresponding spellings to write words and sentences.

Dictation and Spelling

By enabling students to reflect on the sounds they hear in words, dictation gives students a strategy to help them with their own spelling.

There are two kinds of dictation—sounds-in-sequence dictation and whole-word dictation. The two types differ mainly in the amount of help teachers give students in spelling the words.

As with the blending activities, Ms. Hunter starts dictation by giving her students maximum support with sounds-in-sequence dictation. Once she is sure they understand what they are to do, she moves quickly to whole-word dictation. In this way, she is shifting the responsibility of sounding out the words and assigning spellings to her

students.

Throughout this process, students are encouraged to use the **Sound/Spelling Cards** to check the spellings of the sounds and to help them write the words. Dictation exercises are never a test. They are a means of learning to assign spellings to spoken sounds. Her students are encouraged to seek as much support as they need, including using the **Sound/Spelling Cards** and asking the teacher for help.

In addition to writing the words, students are responsible for proofreading and correcting their own work. Students in the **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** programs are consistently asked to take responsibility for their own learning. Proofreading, which begins in kindergarten, is one of the first ways in which they are taught to do this. Each word and sentence is checked against a model on the board. Students decide whether or not they wrote the spelling, word, or sentence correctly. If they see that something is not right or simply could be made better, they circle the incorrect element and write it correctly above the original. In this way, they can compare their first effort with their corrected effort.

Conclusion

The goal of reading is not to sound out words, but to read fluently and automatically in order to comprehend text. Students in second and third grade benefit from continued systematic phonics instruction. Decoding is an effective strategy for achieving fluency, and dictation reinforces the sound/spelling skills that enhance spelling and writing and integrate reading and writing. The consistent instruction demonstrated by Mrs. Coronado and Ms. Hunter provides students with decoding and encoding practice that, when repeated and expanded throughout the year, will lead to fluency, improved comprehension, and correct spelling.

Please note: Mrs. Coronado and Ms. Hunter are second grade teachers and therefore, use Level 2 of **Open Court Reading**. Although the content is different in Level 3, the instructional methods used in this course can be applied to the Phonics and Fluency lessons in Level 3.