

Dictation and Spelling, Grade 1

Assessment

The teacher in this course uses daily informal observation and monitoring as part of her instruction. This monitoring provides her with information about her children's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and progress. Such continuous informal assessment gives Ms. Foster ideas about whether she needs to offer additional practice during lessons and how to plan for Workshop.

Since dictation is a learning activity and not a test, the teacher can observe children as they are engaged in dictation and spelling to determine how they acquire skills and which children may need additional help. Proofreading during dictation is a great way for children to begin self-assessment, and it allows the teacher to monitor student progress as she circulates around the room. There is no need for her to correct the children's papers; they are doing that themselves. This allows her to monitor the children as they make corrections to their own work and to determine which children may need additional spelling help during Workshop.

During sounds-in-sequence dictation, the teacher is providing maximum support, which should assure children's success in the activity. Monitoring during sounds-in-sequence dictation and proofreading will give the teacher an indication of which children understand the directions, which children are having problems with segmentation, which children are not connecting sounds to spellings or are unsure of the sounds and spellings, and which children may still need work on writing the spellings. Children having difficulty can then be helped individually or in small groups during Workshop. Often, a bit more work with phonemic awareness activities, combined with extra practice with writing the spellings, is enough to help children understand and progress along with their classmates.

By paying close attention to the children's responses at this point in their development, you can immediately deal with any confusion about what and where they should write. Free of these distractions, children can then concentrate on actually choosing the correct spellings. Watch how Ms. Foster:

- Has her children signal when they are ready. Ms. Foster expects all her children to do this quickly. None are left behind because they are looking for a pencil or trying to find the page or the correct location on the page.
- Moves through the dictation at a steady pace and expects her class to do the same.
- Watches the children's faces as they respond to see who looks confused and who is on task.
- Circulates around the room as her children write so that she can spot potential problems as they happen.
- Minimizes confusion by using the same procedure in the *Teacher's Edition* for the dictation and proofreading of each word. Children learn the routine for dictation and proofreading; no time is wasted trying to figure out what the teacher expects.

In whole-word dictation, children should be able to segment the words into their individual sounds and connect those sounds to the spellings on their own. They are expected to write the word and then tell the teacher how to spell it.

This is a more complex task for the class and less teacher support is provided. Notice the support that Ms. Foster does provide:

- She circulates around the room to monitor individual children and make sure they know what they are supposed to be doing.
- Once again, she uses the same routine found in the *Teacher's Edition* to present every word so that the children know what's expected of them and can concentrate on the spelling.
- She reminds them to use the *Sound/Spelling Cards*, thus reinforcing the notion that this is a learning experience rather than a testing activity.

- She follows the instruction in the *Teacher's Edition* by allowing children to ask questions if they are unsure of any spellings.

Individual progress with dictation and spelling activities is likely to vary among children. Therefore, Ms. Foster watches her children closely as she conducts activities, noting differences in their work. Again, she can use this information in developing instructional plans for individuals and small groups of children during Workshop.

To make informal observation of dictation and spelling an easy and regular part of your classroom routine, you might want to do the following:

- Before beginning an activity or lesson, choose a group of children you want to observe.
- Decide which aspects of the children's learning you want to observe.
- Record notes as appropriate. For example, you might answer the following questions:
 - -Which children are catching on to the activities?
 - -Which activities are more difficult than others? (For example: Are the single-syllable word dictation activities more accessible than the multisyllabic word dictation activities? Are some spelling patterns more difficult to encode than others? Are some children struggling with medial vowel sounds? Which long-vowel spellings of a specific vowel are problematic?)
- Over several days, observe each child in the class. It is not necessary to collect information about every child every day.
- Make notes to document differences between children and activities.

Open Court Reading and *SRA Imagine It!* also include formal assessments that you may use to determine your children's progress in phonemic awareness and phonics and spelling. These assessments may be found in the following Grade 1 components:

- *Open Court Reading* ©2002, Unit Assessments
- *Open Court Reading* ©2002, Program Assessment
- *SRA Imagine It!* Lesson Assessment
- *SRA Imagine It!* Benchmark Assessment