

Beginning Reading Instruction

Components and Features of a Research-based Reading Program



Texas Reading Initiative

Revised Edition
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Introduction

Reading is central to learning—in school, in the workplace, and in everyday life. How well children learn to read sets the foundation for their future success. The Texas Reading Initiative began in 1996 in response to then-Governor George W. Bush’s challenge to all Texans to focus on the most basic of education goals—teaching all children to read. The goal the Governor set was clear: every child, each and every child, must learn to read.

The Texas Education Agency, in response to Bush’s challenge, has worked on a multifaceted effort aimed at providing information, resources, and knowledge to assist parents, educators, school board members, administrators, public officials, and business and community leaders as they seek to meet this goal. The Initiative has been built on years of demonstrated leadership and commitment of the Texas State Board of Education in the areas of reading development and reading difficulties. The Initiative has relied on the convergence of reading research from the past several decades that illuminates the way children learn to read and how to enhance that process.

In 1997, TEA first published the document, *Beginning Reading Instruction, Components and Features of a Research-Based Reading Program*, also known as the “red book.” This booklet described important aspects of effective reading instruction, as well as elements of classroom and administrative support for effective instruction.

Since its initial publication, over 260,000 copies of *Beginning Reading Instruction* have been printed and distributed. It has served as the basis for professional development, the development of curriculum standards and instructional materials, as well as the establishment of research-based reading programs in schools. The purpose of the booklet was to provide information which can be used to guide decisions as local school districts and educators worked toward then-Governor Bush’s stated goal, “all students will read on grade level or higher by the end of the third grade and continue reading on or above grade level throughout their schooling.”

After the initial distribution of *Beginning Reading Instruction*, several projects were undertaken to develop companion documents to the “red book.” These first companion documents: *Spotlight on Reading, A Companion to Beginning Reading Instruction*; *Beginning Reading Instruction: Practical Ideas for Parents*; and *Instrucción Para Comenzar a Leer: Ideas Prácticas Para Padres de Familia*, were published. In addition to these documents, the Agency, in collaboration with the University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts, has worked on additional booklets that provide information on reading topics such as vocabulary development, comprehension, and content-area reading.

Governor Rick Perry continues to support the goal that all children will learn to read. This “Red Book Series” serves as a resource to our schools and all stakeholders interested in meeting the Governor’s goal.

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Twelve Essential Components of Research-Based Programs for Beginning Reading Instruction

During the past several decades, converging research on beginning reading instruction has revealed a clearer and deeper understanding of the abilities that lead to success with reading and writing, and how children learn to read. This knowledge is useful to parents, teachers, and ultimately to the children. This knowledge has direct implications for preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades, programs of reading instruction, and most particularly for those children who have trouble learning to read.

What are the components of a research-based beginning reading program? This document presents descriptions of these components. Some will be familiar while others may be new. It is important to realize that the presence of only a few components in a program will not assure that every child will become a reader and writer. Rather, it is the orchestration of these components by teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers that will enable us to meet the Governor's challenge.

Research-based programs for beginning reading instruction provide comprehensive, well-organized instructional plans and practice opportunities that permit all children to make sense of reading. Some children begin school with a well-developed understanding of many aspects of reading and become accomplished readers with minimal instruction. Other children need a great deal of careful and meaningful instruction to become accomplished readers. A teacher's task is to find out what students do understand, what they need to learn, and what needs to be provided in the classroom.

As children learn to read, they learn how spoken and written language relate to each other. For this to happen, the components of the reading program, including the instructional materials selected for classroom use, must relate to one another and be orchestrated into sequences of instruction that engage all children and meet their needs. Research also shows that for children whose first language is not English, instruction in the first language may be needed as a foundation for learning to read and write in English.

The following are twelve of the essential components of research-based reading programs. The twelve components are arranged in an order that could imply a sequence of instruction. However, these components should not be considered as rigid, sequential categories; rather, they are interrelated. Teachers work with their students on several components at a time, and children are helped to see the importance of these relationships. For example, when teachers read library books aloud in their classrooms, students make connections between reading and writing, expand their own spoken and written vocabularies, and observe proficient and fluent reading.

1

Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of oral language

Children's comprehension of written language depends in large part upon their effective use and understanding of oral language. Language experiences are a central component of good reading instruction. Children learn a great deal about the world, about themselves, and about each other from spoken language. Kindergarten and first-grade language instruction that focuses on listening, speaking, and understanding includes the following:

- Discussions that focus on a variety of topics
- Activities that help children understand the world, in and out of the classroom
- Songs, chants, and poems that are fun to sing and say
- Concept development and vocabulary-building lessons
- Games and other activities that involve talking, listening and, in particular, following directions

2

Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of printed language

Children's appreciation and understanding of the purposes and functions of written language are essential to their motivation for learning to read. Children must become aware that printed language is all around them on signs, billboards, and labels, and in books, magazines, and newspapers, and that print serves many different purposes. Reading and writing instruction that focuses on the use and appreciation of written language includes the following:

- Activities that help children to understand that print represents spoken language
- Activities that highlight the meanings, uses, and production of the print found in classroom signs, labels, notes, posters, calendars, and directions
- Activities that teach print conventions, such as directionality
- Activities in which children practice how to handle a book—how to turn pages, how to find the tops and bottoms of pages, and how to tell the front and back covers
- Lessons in word awareness that help children become conscious of individual words, for example, their appearance, their length and their boundaries
- Activities in which children practice with predictable and patterned language stories

3

Children have opportunities to hear good stories and informational books read aloud daily

Listening to and talking about books on a regular basis provides children with demonstrations of the benefits and pleasures of reading. Story reading introduces children to new words, new sentences, new places, and new ideas. In addition, they hear the kinds of vocabulary, sentences, and text structures they will find in their school books and be expected to read and understand. Reading aloud to children every day and talking about books and stories supports and extends oral language development and helps students connect oral to written language.

4

Children have opportunities to understand and manipulate the building blocks of spoken language

Children's ability to think about individual words as a sequence of sounds (phonemes) is important to their learning how to read an alphabetic language. Toward that understanding, children learn that sentences are made up of groups of separate words, and that words are made up of separate sounds. Indeed, research has shown conclusively that children's phonemic awareness, their understanding that spoken words can be divided into separate sounds, is one of the best predictors of their success in learning to read. Instruction that promotes children's understanding and use of the building blocks of spoken language includes the following:

- Language games that teach children to identify rhyming words and to create rhymes on their own
- Activities that help children understand that spoken sentences are made up of groups of separate words, that words are made up of syllables, and that words can be broken down into separate sounds
- Auditory activities in which children separate or segment the sounds of words, blend sounds, delete sounds, or substitute new sounds for those deleted

5

Children have opportunities to learn about and manipulate the building blocks of written language

Children must also become expert users of the building blocks of written language. Knowledge of letters (graphemes) leads to success with learning to read. This includes the use, purpose, and function of letters. Instruction that helps children learn about the essential building blocks of written language includes the following:

- Alphabetic knowledge activities in which children learn the names of letters and then learn to identify them rapidly and accurately
- A variety of writing activities in which children learn to write the letters that they are learning to identify

- Writing activities in which children have the opportunity to apply their knowledge of sounds and letters to make words and messages

6

Children have opportunities to learn the relationships between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written language

Increasing children’s awareness of the sounds of spoken language and their familiarity with the letters of written language prepares them to understand the alphabetic principle—that written words are composed of patterns of letters that represent the sounds of spoken words. Effective instruction provides children with explicit and systematic teaching of sound-letter relationships in a sequence that permits the children to assimilate and apply what they are learning. Instruction that helps children understand the alphabetic principle and learn the most common relationships between sounds and letters includes the following:

- Alphabetic awareness activities in which children learn that printed words are made up of patterns of letters
- Lessons in sound-letter relationships that are organized systematically and that provide as much practice and review as is needed
- Activities in which children manipulate letters to change words and spelling patterns

7

Children have opportunities to learn decoding strategies

Efficient decoding strategies permit readers to quickly and automatically translate the letters or spelling patterns of written words into speech sounds so that they can identify words and gain rapid access to their meanings. Children must learn to identify words quickly and effortlessly, so that they can focus on the meaning of what they are reading.

Research indicates that good readers rely primarily on print rather than on pictures or context to help them identify familiar words, and also to figure out words they have not seen before. For this reason, it is important that children learn effective sounding-out strategies that will allow them to decode words they have never seen in print. Some strategies of decoding instruction focus primarily on the relationships between sounds and letters; others combine letter-sound practice with word families, with word parts (for example, onsets and rimes), and with blending activities. More advanced decoding strategies focus on structural analysis, the identification of root words, and prefixes and suffixes.

Instruction should introduce “irregular” words in a reasonable sequence and use these words in the program’s reading materials. It is important to realize, however, that essentially all words must become “sight words”—words children identify quickly, accurately, and effortlessly. Effective decoding instruction is explicit and systematic and can include the following:

- Practice in decoding and identifying words that contain the letter-sound relationships children are learning to read

- Practice activities that involve word families and rhyming patterns
- Practice activities that involve blending together the components of sounded-out words, and “chunking” together the parts of longer words
- “Word play” activities in which children change beginning, middle, or ending letters of related words, thus changing the words they decode and spell
- Introduction of phonetically “irregular” words in practice activities and stories

8

Children have opportunities to write and relate their writing to spelling and reading

As children learn to read and write, they become aware of how these words are spelled. Increasing children’s awareness of spelling patterns hastens their progress in both reading and writing. In the early grades, spelling instruction should be coordinated with the program of reading instruction. As children progress, well organized, systematic lessons in spelling are beneficial. Activities for effective spelling instruction should include the following:

- Activities that are related to the words that children are reading and writing
- Proofreading activities
- An emphasis on pride in correct spelling
- Lessons that help children attend to spelling conventions in a systematic way
- Activities that surround children with words and make reading and writing purpose-filled

9

Children have opportunities to practice accurate and fluent reading in decodable stories

The words in decodable stories emphasize the sound-letter relationships the children are learning. While many predictable and patterned books provide children with engaging language and print experiences, these books may not be based on the sound-letter relationships the children are learning.

Decodable stories provide children with the opportunity to practice what they are learning about letters and sounds. As children learn to read words, sentences, and stories fluently, accurately, and automatically, they no longer have to struggle to identify words and are free to pay closer attention to the meaning.

Most children benefit from direct instruction in decoding, complemented by practice with simply written decodable stories. Further, for some children this sort of systematic approach is critical. Stories should “fit” the child’s reading level. Beginning readers should be able to read easily 90 percent or more of the words in a story, and after practice should be able to do so fluently: that is, quickly, accurately, and effortlessly. Many children benefit from extra practice, including repeated readings of familiar text.

10

Children have opportunities to read and comprehend a wide assortment of books and other texts

As children develop effective decoding strategies and become fluent readers, they read books and other texts that are less controlled in their vocabulary and sentence structure. They learn to use word order (syntax) and content to interpret words and understand their meanings. Soon, they become enthusiastic, independent readers of all kinds of written material including books, magazines, newspapers, computer screens, and more! Providing children with a great many books, both narrative and informational, is of primary importance. Classroom and campus libraries must offer children a variety of reading materials, some that are easy to read and others that are more challenging and of increasing difficulty and complexity. Children need access to many books that travel home for reading with family members. Classrooms that ensure wide reading provide the following:

- Daily time for self-selected reading
- Access to books children want to read in their classrooms and school libraries
- Access to books that can be taken home to be read independently, or to family members

11

Children have opportunities to develop and comprehend new vocabulary through wide reading and direct vocabulary instruction

Written language places greater demands on children's vocabulary knowledge than does their everyday spoken language. In fact, many of the new words children learn are learned from being read to, and as they read on their own.

It is obvious that the number of new words children learn from reading depends upon how much they read and that the amount children read varies enormously. Therefore, it is important that teachers read aloud to children and encourage them to do a great deal of voluntary and independent reading. In addition, during reading instruction, children should be encouraged to attend to the meanings of new words. Activities that promote the acquisition of vocabulary include the following:

- Wide reading of a variety of genres, both narrative and informational
- Instruction that provides explicit information both about the meanings of words and about how they are used in the stories the children are reading
- Activities that involve children in analyzing context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in a reading passage
- Discussions of new words that occur during the course of the day, for example in books that have been read aloud by the teacher, in content area studies and in textbooks
- Activities that encourage children to use words they are learning in their own writing, and to keep records of interesting and related words.

Children have opportunities to learn and apply comprehension strategies as they reflect upon and think critically about what they read

Written language is not just speech written down. Instead, written language offers new vocabulary, new language patterns, new thoughts, and new ways of thinking. Comprehension depends on the ability to identify familiar words quickly and automatically, which includes fluent reading, as well as the ability to figure out new words. But this is not enough.

Comprehension also depends upon the understanding of word meanings, on the development of meaningful ideas from groups of words (phrases, clauses, and sentences) and the drawing of inferences. It also depends upon the demands of the text (its concepts, its density), and the knowledge the reader brings to the text. The discussion of good books with friends and classmates is one avenue for making these connections.

Such discussions will help children appreciate and reflect on new aspects of written language and on the wide, wonderful world of print. For children to receive the greatest benefit and enjoyment from their reading, they must receive comprehension strategy instruction that builds on their knowledge of the world and of language. Comprehension strategy instruction can include the following:

- Activities that help children learn to preview selections, anticipate content, and make connections between what they will read and what they already know
- Instruction that provides options when understanding breaks down (for example, rereading, asking for expert help, and looking up words)
- Guidance in helping children compare characters, events, and themes of different stories
- Activities that encourage discussion about what is being read and how ideas can be linked (for example, to draw conclusions and make predictions)
- Activities that help children extend their reading experiences through the reading of more difficult texts with the teacher

Summary

As these components are translated into classroom experiences, children will have opportunities to talk, read, and write in the many ways they use language both inside and out of the classroom. Because the language arts (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are so interrelated, children must be given the opportunity to practice the strands of language arts in connected and purposeful ways.

Classroom experiences that offer children opportunities to write for real life reasons include having children write letters of invitation to parents and other community members to visit their classrooms, or writing letters of thanks to individuals and organizations that have contributed to their school. Children write to record newly acquired information, to reflect on what they are learning and to organize their ideas. They also work in groups to write reports on special topics.

Classroom experiences that offer children opportunities to read, listen and speak for real life purposes include the reading of “everyday” notes, news, messages, lists, labels, and the reading of compositions and reports written in the classroom. In such classrooms, reading, writing, listening, and speaking become important and meaningful to every child.

Eight Features of Classrooms and Campuses that Support Effective Beginning Reading Instruction

Many factors contribute to the overall success of a beginning reading program. These factors require a total school effort and cannot be accomplished without the support of the school administrators. The following is a list of some classroom and campus features that support a successful reading program.

1

Careful Use of Instructional Time

- While language arts practice occurs through the entire school day, significant time must be protected for and dedicated to reading and language arts instruction. Many campuses dedicate a substantial amount of time each morning for reading and language arts instruction (e.g., 90 minutes or more). Some children need additional assistance and are provided instruction that is based on their specific needs.
- Language and concept development activities are an important part of the classroom curriculum.
- Language arts instruction includes daily reading aloud and discussion of high-quality literature, both fiction and nonfiction.
- Systematic instruction in reading begins as early as kindergarten and continues throughout the primary grades. This careful, consistent instruction is based on thoughtful evaluation of data obtained from classroom observations, formal and informal assessments, and samples of student work.

2

Effective Instructional Practices

- Teachers organize flexible and purposeful groups that are based on children's instructional needs. Membership in these groups changes as the children progress or as they experience difficulty.
- Teachers provide instruction that involves both frequent interactions with children and constructive feedback.
- Children read at an appropriate level in their programs of instruction, and teachers adjust their instructional practices according to how well and how quickly the children progress.

- In first- and second-grade classrooms, children who are having difficulty learning to read are provided with additional reading instruction in a small group or tutoring setting. In addition, before-school or after-school sessions and summer school classes are provided for all children who need extra help. Such instruction is coordinated with the programs the children are engaged in during the regular school day and based on continual and thoughtful analysis of each child's progress and needs as a reader and writer.

3

Sound Instructional Materials

Researched-based criteria are used to select the instructional materials that provide the structure for the classroom reading program. These criteria establish the need for systematic instruction and sufficient practice in a number of aspects of beginning reading. These aspects include the following:

phonemic awareness: Children learn how to divide spoken words into individual sounds and to blend spoken sounds into words.

alphabetic knowledge: Children learn to recognize, name, and write letters.

alphabetic principle: Children learn that sounds can be represented by letters, and to recognize the more useful sound-letter relationships.

decoding strategies: Children learn blending and other decoding strategies that permit them to sound out new words and identify them quickly.

spelling and writing: Children write using their knowledge of printed letters and the sounds they represent. Because knowledge of letter-sound patterns contributes to reading success, spelling instruction is coordinated with the program of reading instruction. Knowledge of and practice in correct spellings also contributes to more effective writing.

manageable, decodable text: Children read words, sentences, and stories that contain the sound-letter relationships they are learning, as well as some “sight” words. Because fluent reading is essential to comprehension, children should practice both oral and silent reading. Children should have easy access to an array of storybooks and other reading materials that they can read on their own and with others.

vocabulary acquisition: The meanings of unfamiliar words are taught and discussed. Students also acquire word meanings through wide reading.

comprehension and understanding: Students discuss the meanings of everything they are learning to read—words, sentences, and stories—with each other and with their teachers and their tutors. They learn comprehension strategies as they learn to read more complex books and other texts.

language activities: Children expand their speaking and listening skills, and their background and vocabulary knowledge in formal and informal activities as they engage in storytime discussion, journal keeping, wide reading, and purposeful writing.

4 Reading Opportunities

- As children develop as readers, they eagerly read books they can comprehend, learn from, and enjoy.
- Students must have access to classroom and school libraries that contain a large and varied book collection that encourages the development of the following:

wide reading: As children become fluent readers, they read increasingly challenging literature, both fiction and nonfiction, of greater complexity and difficulty. They read daily with partners, in groups, and independently at school and at home.

classroom discussions: Teachers and students engage in meaningful discussions that focus on interpretations of and reflective thinking about what they (and others) are reading and writing. They learn to support their interpretations by relying on the text.

comprehension strategies: As they read various kinds of books and other materials, students learn and practice comprehension strategies, sometimes on their own and sometimes with direct help from their teachers.

5 A Variety of Assessment Tools

Teachers and administrators regard assessment as a critical feature of effective instruction. They select and administer assessments according to the needs of individual students, and conduct ongoing evaluations of student progress to help them plan instruction. Parents, teachers, and administrators are kept abreast of every child's reading progress based on such assessment and evaluations. Children who reveal serious problems in reading often need further assessment. However, the following assessment and evaluations should be used with all children:

screening assessments: During kindergarten and first grade, every student is screened for phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and understanding of basic language concepts.

informal assessments: On a regular basis, children are informally assessed to determine if they are making adequate progress. These assessments can include measures of reading rate and accuracy and story retellings. These assessments are used as a basis for adjusting instruction to the needs of each child.

end-of-year assessments: Every student is assessed at the end of the school year to inform parents, teachers, and campus and district administrators about student progress. These assessments are used to make plans to meet the needs of children and of the campus in the following year.

6 A Positive Campus Climate

Administrators and staff create campuses that are welcoming to their students and their families and that contribute to students' successful progress as readers. Some aspects of positive campus climate include:

attractive environment: Buildings and classrooms are clean, neat, and inviting.

book-rich environment: Lots of books are in evidence (and in use) in classroom libraries and the school library.

student work: Children's written work is displayed in the halls and in the classrooms.

positive staff: The staff is friendly and respectful of every student and is committed to a program of continuous student development from one grade level to the next and to stimulating family involvement.

curricular decisions: Effective practices are maintained and often improved; new ideas are discussed, evaluated, and integrated with existing practice.

student attitudes: Students are proud of their accomplishments and respectful of teachers and of other students.

7 Professional Development

- Teachers take part in frequent, relevant and continual professional development that focuses on the implementation of good classroom reading instruction that meets the needs of all students.
- Teachers have time to work with and to consult each other, to visit each other's classrooms, and to make instructional decisions that improve the coordination of instruction from one grade level to the next.
- Teachers are given time to practice instructional strategies and are supported throughout the school year.
- Lead or master teachers are available to teach new and less experienced teachers.

8 Sound Administrative Practices

- Administrators work to determine that all of the resources of the campus, including staff time, are allocated to meet the goal of successful reading instruction for every student.
- Administrators either provide or designate responsibility for instructional leadership that includes monitoring student progress in each classroom and providing help when students are not making sufficient progress.
- In the professional development process, administrators help teachers focus on the performance of their students.
- In their words and in their actions, administrators consistently support the components of effective reading instruction.

Eight Essential Elements for Adapting Instruction to Facilitate Beginning Reading Success for Children with Special Needs

Children enter school with different levels of reading readiness. Some children begin school with a well-developed understanding of reading and become accomplished readers with minimal instruction. In contrast, if children with special needs are to learn to read successfully, many of them will require systematic instruction that is adapted to their unique learning patterns. Planning and adapting instruction for children with special needs (e.g., learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, sensory impairments, emotional/behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism) should be made with careful attention to their strengths and needs. The child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) provides valuable information that teachers can use for adapting the content, the manner in which the content is taught, the materials and technology that support learning, the learning environment, and the ways in which the child demonstrates learning. Using this as a guide, teachers design and adapt instruction daily to meet a child's particular needs as he or she engages in learning.

The following are eight elements that teachers and researchers have found to be essential in adapting instruction to assist children with special needs to become successful readers, whether these children are just entering school or are older children who are learning to read. While these elements are key for the success of students with special needs, they are oftentimes valuable in assisting other students who are struggling readers. The eight elements are linked to the essential components for research-based programs for beginning reading instruction that are discussed in the first section.

1

Children with special needs benefit from explicit instruction

To teach children with special needs to be successful readers, instruction needs to be tailored so that they can learn efficiently. Explicit instruction promotes efficient learning for children and includes:

- Thinking processes that are visible through modeling. For example, the teacher may demonstrate how to form and say different sounds as children watch the teacher's mouth, or demonstrate how to find the main idea of a story by reading and modeling, or how to ask and answer questions like "Who or what is this about?" and "What is happening?"

- Lessons that introduce a few ideas or skills and provide practice activities for each idea or skill. For example, the teacher introduces segmenting simple words by phonemes by saying and clapping each sound, by having the children count each sound using their fingers, and by having the children sort their names and other words on the word wall based on the number of sounds. The teacher introduces one short vowel sound and several consonant sounds that are not easily confused, and then has the children combine the letter sounds to read and spell words.
- Instruction that varies the pace. To vary pace, the teacher may repeat key ideas or directions, stop and check for understanding, or allow extra time for children to complete an activity.
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary and concepts using tools such as pictures or word maps that are created with the children.
- Visual and tactile supports for auditory information. For example, when children are blending and segmenting words, the teacher may have them write or trace each letter as they segment the sounds and then blend the sounds together to make the word. When teaching a reading selection, the teacher writes the key vocabulary for major points on a transparency or board.
- Immediate, corrective feedback and reteaching, if needed, so that children practice skills correctly.

2

Children with special needs benefit from multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate learning so that reading becomes automatic

To become fluent in various reading skills and strategies, children with special needs require extensive practice. Provide time for children to repeat and/or select related activities until they are performing the skills effortlessly and quickly. Be creative in giving them several ways to “show what they know and can do” when reading. Instruction that facilitates meaningful practice and allows children to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways includes:

- Learning center activities that provide children opportunities to practice what they have learned rather than introducing new skills. These activities oftentimes use materials such as magnetic letters for making words, sentences that have been cut into phrases or words so that the children can construct and read familiar sentences, and tracing and writing materials for spelling.
- Games such as generic board games that allow children to practice sight words or beginning and ending sounds, or oral language games such as “I Spy,” played with rhyming words or sounds.
- Songs and chants.
- Repeated reading using partners or taped/CD-ROM books to increase reading fluency.
- Word card or sentence strip activities to build automatic word recognition.
- Self-monitoring opportunities such as charting the number of sight words a child reads correctly or the child’s reading rate.

- Individual or cooperative projects in which children choose how to demonstrate their learning, such as making a picture, advertisement, or storyboard, and then telling about it.
- Test/assignment adaptations, such as simplifying language; repeating or reading directions; using picture cues; increasing space for writing; reducing the number/size of assignments; allowing the child to respond in a different way such as “telling” rather than “writing”; extending time; awarding partial credit; or scoring spelling and grammar based on the child’s developmental level.

3

Children with special needs benefit from instruction that includes opportunities to maintain and transfer (generalize) the skills and strategies learned

Children with special needs benefit from activities that allow them to use their newly-learned reading skills and strategies during independent practice activities (maintenance) and with a variety of materials, in different settings, and with different people (generalization). Different settings might include resource programs, the home, and the general education classroom. Different people might include the special and general education teachers, the teaching assistant, and the family. Activities that promote maintenance and generalization include:

- Application of word recognition skills to word games, different texts, spelling activities, and reading in different content areas.
- Application of previously taught vocabulary in activities across the curriculum, with vocabulary games, and as part of homework.
- Comprehension strategies used with both listening and reading, such as learning how to identify the parts of a story or the main idea, or how to stop and ask questions to check their understanding.
- Reminders of previously taught reading strategies posted in the classroom, presented on cue cards, and reinforced by teachers and parents.
- Reading instruction using texts at children’s reading levels, whether in general education, special education, or other special programs.

4

Children with special needs benefit from instruction in which their progress is monitored regularly and adjustments made as needed

Children learn at various rates. Keeping track of the progress of children with special needs through regular monitoring helps ensure that they are learning efficiently. Based on information gained from monitoring, instruction can be adjusted, extra assistance can be given, or reteaching can occur. Children also like to monitor their own progress and set their own goals. Progress monitoring strategies include:

- One-minute timed reading or writing activities collected on a regular schedule.

- Portfolios in which the children place their best work and a list of their accomplishments.
- Quick checking of learning, such as having children read the words posted on the word wall for monitoring word recognition.
- Self-monitoring progress charts for books read and spelling, vocabulary, and sight words learned, that the children keep to track their progress.
- Rubrics with the major features such as setting, characters, problem, etc. to judge the quality of children's oral language and the content of retellings.
- Questioning that requires children to think aloud so that their thinking processes become visible to the teacher (e.g., Tell me how you figured out that word. Show me how you got that answer).
- Anecdotal notes of observations when children are involved in reading—strengths, weaknesses, interests, work habits. These notes can be written on sticky notes and attached to work.

5

Children with special needs benefit from instruction using materials at their reading level

Children learn best when they work with materials that are challenging but not so difficult as to be frustrating. It is important, therefore, to have in the classroom materials with various difficulty levels. Materials can also be adapted to better match the learning levels of children with special needs. In gathering and selecting materials, teachers should consider providing the following:

- Classroom libraries in which books are grouped by reading level so that children can select interesting materials at their reading levels (e.g., high interest/controlled vocabulary books, children's magazines, humorous books, books with same-age characters).
- Decodable texts that emphasize the letter-sound relationships the children are learning and provide opportunities for them to practice their new knowledge while reading.
- Books on tape and on CD-ROM that enable children to read repeatedly so as to build automatic word recognition, fluency, and listening comprehension.
- Materials tailored to individual needs, such as large print materials, materials with a limited number of words per page, materials that use pictures paired with untaught words, and materials that contain text features to facilitate comprehension (e.g., headings, inserted questions).
- Materials for developing early reading skills, such as counters for children to push into boxes to count phonemes; letter tiles for making words; and story maps to teach parts of simple stories.
- Materials to assist children with spelling and handwriting, such as textured letters to trace, pencil grips, and paper with raised lines.

6

Children with special needs benefit from flexible grouping and intensive instruction

When children with special needs have been taught the routines for working together, they learn best from instruction in small same-ability groups and from working with more capable peers. They benefit from small-group instruction that is intensive (i.e., five days a week for at least 20 minutes) so that they can develop their reading skills. Flexible grouping patterns include:

- Whole class grouping for teacher read-alouds, book discussions, and the introduction of new vocabulary and strategies.
- Mixed-ability grouping (e.g., cooperative learning activities) in which children have different roles and can support each other's reading.
- Small same-ability grouping (5:1 or less) for explicit instruction in specific reading skills.
- Flexible-skills grouping for instruction on particular skills such as onset-rime, blending and segmenting phonemes, making a story map, and vocabulary development.
- Pairing of children for skills practice such as oral reading to build fluency and comprehension, peer editing, and word study activities such as sorting and making words with movable letters.

7

Children with special needs benefit from technology-assisted reading instruction

Assistive technology devices and services can be used to help children with special needs access and comprehend text more successfully. Assistive technology devices should be selected based on the reading tasks in the classroom and the special needs of children. Assistive technology services should be provided to ensure that devices are obtained and training given in how to use the devices. Some possible assistive technology devices include:

- Computer-assisted instruction that features specialized software that provides pop-up menus for key vocabulary, modeling of fluent reading, and many opportunities for children to practice word recognition skills independently.
- Computer software that includes speech synthesis capabilities so that children can hear directions, hear the text read, and have words pronounced.
- Computer software programs that require children to give frequent responses and that provide corrective feedback.
- Books on tape paired with teacher-facilitated comprehension strategies so that children can access text.
- Tools that spell and define vocabulary words.
- Specialized input devices (e.g., modified/enhanced keyboards, switches) to allow children to use computers.
- Voice input devices to help students make words and create stories.

Children with special needs benefit from collaborative efforts among school personnel and parents that support the children's unique learning abilities and needs

Collaboration among parents, teachers, and administrators is essential for children with special needs to achieve academic and behavioral success. School personnel and family members can share valuable information about early reading skills, teaching strategies, co-teaching possibilities, and school/home coordination. The personnel involved may include the speech-language pathologist, school nurse, counselor, teacher of students who are visually impaired, teacher of students who are auditorally impaired, physical therapist, occupational therapist, and/or behavior specialist. Collaborative activities that can enhance successful early reading instruction include:

- Discussion of the Individualized Education Program (iep) reading goals and objectives among the parents and all professionals who work with the child.
- Identification by professionals and parents of appropriate adaptations to promote success with reading, such as assistive technology tools, multiple practice opportunities, use of specialized materials, and family support.
- Discussion of the children's progress on a frequent basis to ensure that reading skills and strategies are being learned, maintained, and generalized across materials, people, and settings.
- Identification of and shared responsibility for gathering resources.
- Coordination of schedules to ensure that reading instruction occurs during optimal learning time, to support co-teaching opportunities, or to provide the children with multiple times to participate in reading instruction.

Summary

Making reading instruction successful for children with special needs requires the use of meaningful, explicit instruction in which skills and strategies are taught using modeling with explanations across activities and settings. Effective instruction also includes many opportunities for practice with feedback and ongoing monitoring of learning progress. Children with special needs benefit from small group instruction and peer tutoring. Like all children, those with special needs profit from careful planning that considers their unique learning strengths and needs. To tailor and support instruction for these children, teachers collaborate with other professionals and with parents, thereby, working in teams.

The goals of beginning reading instruction for children with special needs are the same as those for all children:

- to provide opportunities for children to listen, talk, read, and write in the many ways that children use language both inside and outside of the classroom, and,
- to systematically develop the skills and strategies needed in the component areas of phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and connecting reading and writing

so that reading, writing, listening, and speaking become meaningful and effective ways of communicating in school and in life.

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