

Note #5, to Teachers Teaching Kindergarten Children in Reading Mastery

The Greatest Teaching Program Ever

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Some New Things
Word Number Increases each Lesson
Student Story Books
Decoding Continues to Grow
The Sounds Go Underground
How it is Learned
The Final Product within the Reader

This Note is shorter but heavy. From lesson 80 to 100, the transition is nearly completed from out-loud sounding out to silent decoding of words in passages. Lesson 107 is where this way of reading begins so lesson 100 is close to that mark. The questions will be: First: how is it taught? And then, How does this work?

Some New things.

The personal pronoun, I. This is useful in the stories and anticipates the long vowel for /i/, - but not until lesson 130. Also there are new sounds for the letter o. Children learn the two most common irregular words, *said* and *was*, next to *is*. As taught, these words should not be memorized as “out law” words. They should be sounded out as all other words have been and then, from that sounding out, remember the word. In other words, the letter sounds are the best cues for memory, not the visual shape of the whole words, or any other visual cue of the letter shapes. There are neurological reasons for this.

Word number increases in each lesson

The rate of words learned per lesson increases starting from 15, 44, 47 in previous lessons, to 56, 66, 88 and 91 words per 20 lessons in future lessons. This adds up to a total of 397. That’s almost three new words per lesson, on the average, for the full kindergarten year. Why are these new readers able to learn words at a faster rate? (See below)

This pace will increase within each following grade to at least 150 to 200 words per 20 lessons. That’s a little more than eight words per lesson in first grade, words that are also more complicated. They accumulate fast.

Student story books.

Stories get longer, from 15 words to 55 words per story by lesson 100. Stories at the end of the year run 136 words. Children not only learn more words per lesson they must read more words in each lesson. This means that they are constantly re-reading

and practicing words previously learned. This repetition firms up their learning so that the words become automatically recognized.

How does this recognition happen automatically? It starts with lesson 65 where children are taught to silently think the sounds that they see. It can be seen by teachers, in front of their eyes, if they watch and listen carefully through these lessons.

Decoding continues to grow

The big story of these lessons continues to be decoding. Skills in applying the decoding strategy are continuously being developed. The decoding strategy is essentially a way of first applying the alphabetic principle out loud and then of learning new letter/sound correspondences and patterns. Specifically it is moving continuously from one letter/sound correspondence to another until a word is recognized. This strategy simultaneously assists both in further learning how to apply the alphabetic principle and in identifying words. The strategy both further develops the tool as well as uses the tool for word recognition.

The program starts with single syllable words with slow consonants and vowels. Stop consonants had to be added at the beginning of a word. More letters of the alphabet are constantly being added, especially the most common vowel sounds. Various consonant blends and consonant diagraphs are added. Applying this particular decoding strategy to all of these conditions needs to be learned.

Throughout research literature, decoding strategies are called “self-teaching mechanisms”. These mechanisms apply the alphabetic principle to more complicated words in increasingly more skillful ways. Once learned, this self-teaching mechanism teaches new words with no, or very little, teacher instruction. This accounts for the ability to learn so many words within a rather short period of time.

The sounds go underground

The last way that the principle is applied is the silent way, where the speech sounds go underground. This happens when sounding out-loud decoding becomes too slow for reading. Reading requires a faster pace. So, decoding goes underground where the speech sounds lie hidden underneath the letters that are seen. In reading, the speech sounds are, at least somewhat, hidden beneath letters. At the beginning, instruction tries to make the speech sounds more prominent for learning, but eventually they become almost completely hidden where they can move fast. They must keep up to the eye movements of the reader.

How it is learned

This is why it is important to continue with the “think” method in lessons 70 to 80 with the red box to begin preparing for the last step in learning to read at the word level. Children must practice hiding the sounds under the letters. The think method means “thinking the sounds” when seeing the words. This is taught with single words in the

red box and is then slowly applied in the first sentence of the story reading, starting in lesson 75.

After reading the story twice, children apply the think method and say the word the fast way to just the first sentence. This practice continues to lesson 86. In lessons 87-90, the first and second sentences are read the fast way with slightly shorter think time. In lessons 91-93 the whole story is re-read the fast way, after it has been read two times, one for accuracy and one for questions.

Lessons 94 - 100 continues this progression, one small step further. The first reading is for accuracy and questions. The second reading is with the fast way, also with questions. This step continues until lesson 107, where all words are read the fast way in the first reading. From here on, all stories are read the fast way, in the first reading. This is a typical Engelmann way of teaching a complex skill. He breaks it down to the easiest form, the red box, and grows it step by step.

The final product within the reader (In my view)

Once the sounds are hidden, reading looks like it's all a visual activity. It isn't. Speech sounds are continuously active, hidden under the eye movements. If you listen carefully, you can hear them. Once learned, there is nothing in reading that the speech sounds don't touch. They drive reading through the innate mechanism of speech. We read because we can speak. Reading "piggy backs" onto speech.

But, in order to do this, the sounds must be "glued" to the letters so that when they go underground and move fast, they continue to "stick" to the letters when letters are seen in the print. If glued through learning and practice, the brain does the rest. It decodes print, instantly, the same as it does speech. This instant decoding enables a higher level of comprehension. The reader no longer needs to pay as much attention to word recognition leaving the rest to thinking about content and message. WOW heavy duty stuff.