

Chapter 5
An Overview of Beginning
Reading

Direct Instruction Reading

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Douglas W. Carnine
University of Oregon

Jerry Silbert
University of Oregon

Edward .J Kame'enui
University of Oregon

Sara G. Tarver
University of Wisconsin, Madison

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(Re-configured and highlighted by Charles Arthur)

The beginning reading stage refers to the period when students are learning to read the first several hundred words presented in the classroom reading program. Some students may come to school able to read many words. For these students, little instruction may be needed for them to complete the beginning stage. Other students will enter school with very little ability to read words. These students may require anywhere from 6 months to 1 year of instruction before completing the beginning stage.

From our perspective, the beginning stage is focused primarily on phonics instruction. For that reason we begin this chapter with a discussion of terms having to do with phonics instruction and a brief listing of different approaches to phonics instruction. Next, we discuss the controversies (or the debates or wars) that surround beginning reading instruction. We begin by contrasting code- emphasis and meaning-emphasis approaches to teaching beginning reading; that contrast was central to the debates of the 1970s and 1980s. Then we go on to relate that contrast to (a) direct instruction versus whole language and constructivist practices as they are employed today, and (b) the NRP's recommendations for explicit and systematic phonics instruction. Finally, we present practices for teaching beginning reading skills from the perspective of our direct-instruction model. As the reader will see, our approach is a code-emphasis approach, and our methods of teaching phonics are highly explicit and systematic.

Although phonics is the primary focus in beginning reading instruction, beginning reading programs also include instruction in phonemic awareness, beginning vocabulary and language skills, and beginning comprehension skills. Phonemic awareness instruction is the topic of Chapter 6. Beginning vocabulary, language, and comprehension instruction are discussed in Chapter 11.

Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction teaches the relationships between the letters of written language (graphemes) and the individual sounds of spoken language (phonemes). It also teaches how these relationships are used to read and write words. The following terms have been used to refer to these relationships:

- Letter-sound associations
- Letter-sound correspondences
- Sound-symbol correspondences
- Sound-spelling
- Grapheme-phoneme correspondences • Graphophonemic relationships

The goal of phonics instruction is to help children learn and use the alphabetic principle- the understanding that written letters correspond to spoken sounds and that the correspondences are systematic and predictable. Knowledge of the alphabetic principle helps children to (a) recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and (b) decode new words independently.

In Figure 5.1, we list and describe briefly six approaches to phonics instruction that were described in the NRP report and Put Reading First. As indicated by the descriptions, children pronounce sounds in isolation in some approaches (synthetic phonics, phonics through spelling); in others, they do not (analytic phonics, analogy-based phonics). Some approaches emphasize correspondences for units of sound larger than phonemes (analogy-based phonics, onset-rime phonics); others emphasize correspondences for individual phonemes (synthetic phonics, phonics through spelling). In embedded phonics, correspondences are not taught in isolation but are taught only during the reading of connected text. Teaching phonics in

context does not allow for explicit and systematic teaching of phonics; therefore, embedded phonics is neither explicit nor systematic.

Figure 5.1 Six Approaches to Phonics Instruction

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Synthetic phonics | Children learn how to convert letters or letter combinations into sounds, and then how to blend the sounds together to form recognizable words. |
| Analytic phonics | Children learn to analyze letter-sound relationships in previously learned words. They do not pronounce sounds in isolation. |
| Analogy-based phonics | Children learn to use parts of word families they know to identify words they don't know that have similar parts. |
| Phonics through spelling | Children learn to segment words into phonemes and to make words by writing letters for phonemes. |
| Embedded phonics | Children are taught letter-sound relationships during the reading of connected text. (Since children encounter different letter-sound relationships as they read, this approach is not systematic or explicit.) |
| Onset-rime phonics | Children learn to identify the sound of the letter or letters before the first vowel (the onset) in a one-syllable word and the sound of the remaining part of the word (the rime). |

As pointed out by the authors of *Put Reading First*, some programs of instruction combine elements from different approaches. Our direct-instruction model does just that. Although the beginning phonics instruction that we recommend is primarily synthetic phonics, elements of onset-rime phonics, analytic phonics, and analogy-based phonics are evident in some of the teaching formats that we present for teaching decoding skills **after the beginning stage**. Furthermore, writing letters for phonemes and phonemic spelling of regular words are inherent parts of the beginning reading instruction that we recommend.

The Great Debate: Code-Emphasis vs. Meaning-Emphasis Programs

Controversy surrounds the beginning reading stage. The intense "debates," even "wars," of the last 50 years are described, along with research relevant to those debates/wars, in a later chapter on research on beginning reading instruction. In this overview chapter, we focus on instructional practices.

Chall (1967) classified beginning reading approaches as either code-emphasis or meaning-emphasis approaches. **Code-emphasis programs emphasize predictable letter-sound correspondences and the reading of words composed of those correspondences.** Code-emphasis programs usually referred to in lay terms as phonics programs. Programs that emphasize the reading of words that occur frequently in spoken language, regardless of the letter-sound irregularity of the words, are called meaning-emphasis programs.

Code-emphasis programs initially select words made up of letters and letter combinations representing the same sound in different words. This consistency between letters and their sound values enables students to read many different words by blending the sounds for each new word. For example, the word *sat* is sounded out as "sssaaat" and pronounced "sat." The word *land* is sounded out as "laaannd" and pronounced "land." The letter *a* represents the same sound in *sat* and *land*, as well as in other words initially appearing in a code-emphasis program. In code-emphasis programs, a new word generally is not introduced until students have mastered the letter-sound correspondences that make up the word. For example, the word *mat* is not introduced until the students know the sounds for the letters *m*, *a*, and *t*.

In contrast, **meaning-emphasis programs initially select words that appear frequently in print regardless of their letter-sound irregularity.** The assumption is that frequently appearing words are familiar and, consequently, **easier for students to learn.** Students are encouraged to use a variety of sources pictures, context of the story, word configuration, and initial letter-as cues to use in decoding words. Unlike the code-emphasis programs, the meaning-emphasis programs do not control words so that the same letter represents the same sound in most initially appearing words. For example, it would not be uncommon to

see the words done, to, not, and book among the first 50 words introduced in a meaning-emphasis program. Note that in each word, the letter o represents a different sound.

Some other differences between code-emphasis and meaning-emphasis approaches are:

1. Code-emphasis approaches emphasize oral reading; meaning-emphasis approaches emphasize silent reading.
2. Code-emphasis approaches emphasize sounding out of words, meaning-emphasis approaches emphasize whole word reading.
3. Code-emphasis approaches emphasize reading new words in isolation, meaning-emphasis approaches emphasize reading new words in context.
4. Code-emphasis approaches emphasize accuracy of reading words in sentences; meaning-emphasis approaches emphasize guessing at unfamiliar words or skipping unfamiliar words to maintain the flow of reading.

In a well-designed code-emphasis approach, the emphasis changes overtime. For example, the initial emphasis on oral reading shifts to an emphasis on silent reading after students can read passages fluently. The initial emphasis on sounding out words shifts to an emphasis on automatic recognition of words; however, students are taught to sound out words that they do not recognize automatically throughout all stages of instruction.

Whole language is a meaning-emphasis approach which differs from most meaning-emphasis basals in this respect: words are not selected at all; instead, authentic literature is selected and students read whatever words are in the text. **In whole- language teaching, meaning is not only the goal of reading instruction but also the means through which children learn to read.** Goodman (1986) states that "The focus is on meaning and not on language itself, in authentic speech and literacy events" (p. 40). Children are thought to acquire literacy skills by reading. They do not first learn reading skills and then apply them to pronounce words and get meaning; **instead, they first get the meaning and then use meaning cues to decode unfamiliar words.** They move from understanding the whole text (i.e., the meaning) to recognizing the vehicles of that meaning (i.e., the paragraphs, sentences, phrases, and words).

Continuing Debate: Phonics vs. Whole Language

Whole language became increasingly popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Moats (2000) explained the growing popularity this way:

Relying on theory derived largely from introspection into their own mental processes, Ken Goodman and Frank Smith in the late 1960s advanced the notion that meaning and purpose should be the salient goals in early reading instruction. Observing that adults appear to process the written word without recoding it letter by letter or sound by sound, and claiming that children should learn to read as naturally as they learn to speak, Smith asserted that the decomposition of words into sounds was pointless; that attention to letters was unnecessary and meaningless; that letter- sound correspondences were "jabberwocky" to be avoided; and that skill development was largely boring, repetitive, nonsensical, and unrelated to developing real readers. Smith, Goodman, and their disciples pushed ideas that were eagerly and readily embraced by progressive educators turned off by drab basal readers, mechanistic drills, and the knowledge that the basal readers in use had not solved all of their instructional challenges. Teachers were persuaded that the cause of most reading failure was insufficient emphasis on reading real books for real purposes. By the mid-1980s, schools were ready to throw out basal readers, phonics workbooks, spelling programs, and other "canned" material so that teachers could create individualized reading instruction with "authentic" children's literature. (p. 7)

Moats (2000) went on to delineate the major premises advanced by whole language advocates and to show how facts established by scientific investigations contradict those premises:

- Premise: Reading is acquired naturally. Fact: Learning to read is not a "natural" process. Most children must be taught to read through a structured and protracted process in which they are made aware of sounds and the symbols that represent them, and then learn to apply these skills automatically and attend to meaning.
- Premise: Children will extract the structure and form of print if they are exposed to it sufficiently in the context of meaning-making activities. Fact: Our alphabetic writing system is not learned simply from exposure to print. Phonological awareness is primarily responsible for the ability to sound words out. The ability to use phonics and to sound words out, in turn, is primarily responsible for the development of context-free word recognition ability, which in turn is primarily responsible for the development of the ability to read and comprehend connected text.
- Premise: Learning to read and spell is just like learning to talk. Fact: Spoken language and written language are very different, mastery of each requires unique skills.
- Premise: Good readers can recognize words on the basis of a few sound-symbol correspondences, such as beginning and ending consonants, and don't really need to know the inner details, such as vowels; therefore, teaching all letter-sound correspondences and sounding out are unnecessary. Fact: The most important skill in early reading is the ability to read single words completely, accurately, and fluently; to read single words out of context, children use knowledge of phonic correspondences.
- Premise: When a child is reading and cannot recognize a word, the child should be asked to guess at the word from context and then sound the word out if guessing does not yield a word that would make sense in the sentence. Fact: Context is not the primary factor in word recognition; guessing from context leads to egregious errors.

Many of the unsupported ideas and practices associated with whole language live on under the guise of "balanced" reading instruction (Moats, 2000). The three-cueing system and Reading Recovery are examples of approaches touted as "balanced" though they clearly are outgrowths of Goodman's (1969) method of assessment that he called "miscue analysis" (Hempenstall, 1999, 2002; Moats, 2000; Wren, 2002). Goodman (1967) observed that young children made errors as they read that did not change the meaning of the text (e.g., "horse" for "pony"). Based on these observations, he concluded that good readers depend largely on context, and not on sounding out, to predict and read upcoming words in text. He defined reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" in which the reader need sample or look at only a few of the words on the page to confirm their predictions or guesses of upcoming words. Smith (1978, 1982) expanded on this theme, giving rise to the three-cueing system, which places greater emphasis on syntactic and semantic cues than grapho-phonemic cues. Similarly, the "running records" procedure employed in Reading Recovery emphasizes errors of meaning rather than phonic errors. Moreover, the Reading Recovery approach embraces a host of ideas and practices associated with whole language-teaching children to guess at words from context and initial letter, incidental phonics and decoding instruction as students compose their own sentences and stories, and predictable texts.

In summary, although the whole-language ideas and practices put forth by Goodman and Smith in the 1960s and 1970s have been thoroughly refuted by scientific research, they live on by masquerading as new approaches with new names. This lesson from our history suggests that knowing what scientific research really says about reading instruction is essential to avoiding sound-good fads that simply don't work. It is critically important that teachers know what the scientific research really says about reading instruction so that they can select practices and approaches that are research based and discard those that are not. It was toward that end that NRP was convened to analyze the massive body of research on beginning reading and render conclusions useful to classroom teachers.

Figure 5.2 Scientific-Based Conclusions About Beginning Phonics Instruction

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than nonsystematic or no phonics instruction.</p> <p>Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves kindergarten and first-grade children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.</p> <p>Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is most effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade; to be effective with young learners, it should begin with foundational knowledge involving letters and phonemic awareness.</p> <p>Systematic phonics instruction includes teaching children to use their knowledge of phonics to read and write words.</p> | <p>Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is particularly beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read and who are at risk for developing future reading problems.</p> <p>Systematic phonics instruction helped children at all socioeconomic levels make significantly greater gains in reading than did non-phonics instruction.</p> <p>Systematic phonics instruction is effective when delivered through tutoring, through small groups, and through teaching classes of students. Approximately 2 years of systematic and explicit phonics instruction is sufficient for most students.</p> |
|--|---|

Adapted from the NRP Report of the Subgroups, Chapter 2, Part 2, "Phonics instruction, pp. 93-96.

NRP Recommendations

As indicated by the NRP conclusions shown in Figure 5.2, the NRP specifies that the phonics instruction that is most beneficial to children is both explicit and systematic. In the NRP report, systematic phonics instruction was contrasted with instruction that is not systematic in this way: -

Systematic phonics instruction typically involves explicitly teaching students a prespecified set of letter-sound relations and having students read text that provides practice using these relations to decode words. Instruction lacking an emphasis on phonics instruction does not teach letter-sound relations systematically and selects text for children according to other principles. The latter form of instruction includes whole word programs, whole language programs, and some basal reader programs. (pp. 2-92)

The three types of programs that do not teach phonics explicitly and systematically were described this way in Put Reading First (p.17):

- Literature-based programs that emphasize reading and writing activities. Phonics instruction is embedded in these activities, but letter-sound relationships are taught incidentally, usually based on key letters that appear in student reading materials.
- Basal reading programs that focus on whole-word or meaning-based activities. These programs pay only limited attention to letter-sound relationships and provide little or no instruction in how to blend letters to pronounce words.
- Sight-word programs that begin by teaching children a sight-word reading vocabulary of from 50 to 100 words. Only after they learn to read these words do children receive instruction in the alphabetic principle.

Put Reading First (p. 16) stated that effective programs offer phonics instruction that:

- Helps teachers explicitly and systematically instruct students in how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words;
- Helps students understand why they are learning the relationships between letters and sounds;
- Helps students apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text;
- Helps students apply what they learn about sounds and letters to their own writing;
- Can be adapted to the needs of individual students based on assessment;
- Includes alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and the reading of text, as well as systematic phonics instruction.

Direct Instruction, Constructivist Approaches, and Systematic/ Explicit Phonics Instruction

Today, the whole-language approach is included in the rubric of constructivist approaches to teaching. Constructivist philosophy, as applied to the teaching of reading, leads to the belief that readers construct meaning from text.; they do not simply see the meaning conveyed by the text. From this philosophy stems practices that are very different from those employed in a direct instruction approach with a code-emphasis. Carmine (2000) contrasted a constructivist reading classroom with a direct instruction classroom in this way:

First graders in a constructivist reading classroom might be found scattered around the room: some children are walking around, some are talking, some painting, others watching a video, some looking through a book, and one or two reading with the teacher. The teacher uses a book that is not specifically designed to be read using phonics skills, and when a child misses a word, the teacher will let the mistake go by so long as the meaning is preserved to some degree (for instance if a child reads "horse" instead of "pony"). If a child is stuck on a word, the teacher encourages her to guess, to read to the end of the sentence and then return to the word, to look at the picture on the page, and possibly, look at the first letter of the word.

In a direct instruction classroom, some children are at their desks writing or reading phonics-based books. The rest of the youngsters are sitting with the teacher. The teacher asks them to sound out challenging words before reading the story. When the children read the story, the teacher has them sound out the words if they make mistakes. (p. 5)

The practices employed in the direct instruction classroom are consistent with NRP's recommendation for systematic and explicit phonics instruction; the practices employed in the constructivist classroom are not.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, we provide the rationale for the practices which we recommend. In later chapters on beginning reading instruction, we provide detailed descriptions of the practices.

Rationale for a Direct Instruction Approach

We recommend using a code-emphasis program approach during the beginning stage over a meaning-emphasis approach because a code- emphasis approach more readily allows the teacher to present reading instruction in a more efficient and humane manner. Instruction is efficient when the teacher can present the maximum number of skills in the minimum amount of time. Instruction is humane when students encounter a high degree of success.

Instruction can be presented more efficiently in a code-emphasis approach than in a meaning- emphasis approach because a code-emphasis approach better facilitates generalization. The introduction of each new letter-sound correspondence results in the students reading many new words. For example, let's say that the students already know the sounds for the letters m, s, t, f, d, r, n, h, k, i, a, o, and c. The introduction of the letter i results in the students being able to read

these words: sit, in, hid, lid, tin, Tim, hill, sin, miss, kiss, and fill. In a meaning-emphasis approach, each word is introduced as a separate unit.

Instruction can be presented in a more humane manner in a code-emphasis program than in a meaning-emphasis program. The former more readily allows the teacher to provide each student with a higher degree of success in the reading process. When word reading is introduced in a code-emphasis approach program, students are taught an overt strategy--saying the sounds for each letter in the word in a left-to-right progression, then saying the blended sounds at a normal rate. If a student misreads a word, the cause of the error and an effective correction procedure are clear. For example, if a student says "mud" when encountering the word mad, the teacher checks to see if the student knows the sound for the letter u. If the student does not know the correct sound, the teacher presents exercises to teach the missed sound. Words with the letter u would be avoided until the reteaching is accomplished. In summary, the code-emphasis approach facilitates the use of simple teaching procedures and allows for effective corrections. The students learn a strategy that is used again and again.

In contrast, meaning-emphasis programs do not teach the student to rely on a single strategy because there is little consistency between letter-sound relationships in the words students read, especially regarding vowel sounds. The students are encouraged to use a variety of strategies to decode words. Students are told to use the initial sound, the shape of the word, the context of the sentence in which the word appears, and the pictures on the page in which the word appears as cues to decoding the word. This reliance on a multifaceted approach results in relatively long, complex teacher explanations. For example, a typical meaning-emphasis program might introduce the word cat using the following steps:

1. The teacher writes a sentence on the board that has the word cat, and reads the sentence.
2. The teacher then displays flash cards containing the words can and cat, and asks the children how they are alike.
3. The teacher reminds the children that the middle letter represents the shortvowel sound in each word.
4. Finally, the children are asked to read the word cat and identify the final sound.

This explanation contains words that more naive students may not understand (e.g., middle, final). Also, there is a relatively high degree of teacher talk. The higher the ratio of teacher talk to student response, the less attentive students are likely to be.

If a student misreads a word in a meaning-emphasis approach program, there is no simple correction available to the teacher that corrects the immediate mistake and prevents the error from reoccurring,

Let's say a student is reading the sentence: The boy saw a little bird. When coming to the word saw, the student says "said." A correction the teacher might use would involve explaining that the word saw could not be said because it does not end with d and does not make sense in the sentence. The correction tells the student why a word couldn't be said, but does not provide him with a strategy enabling him to figure out the word. The student might say "sees" the next time he or she encounters the word in a sentence.

The relatively complex teaching strategy and the relatively long teaching demonstrations inherent in a meaning-emphasis approach places the instructionally naive student at risk. Students who are inattentive to begin with are not likely to attend to teaching demonstrations that do not consistently demand active involvement.

We strongly recommend the use of a code-emphasis approach as the tool for teaching beginning reading. The importance of students receiving the highest quality of instruction available during the beginning reading stage cannot be overemphasized. For the child, initial reading instruction represents his or her first big challenge in the school setting. Every child should be guaranteed the right to successfully meet this challenge.

Our experience in the schools over the past 25 years has led us to a strong belief that virtually all of the reading failure in the early grades could be avoided if teachers: (a) were given well-constructed code-emphasis instructional materials, and (b) received adequate on-the-job training in how to present beginning reading instruction. Our experience in training teachers has shown that the average person will need 50 to 60 hours of preservice and in-the-classroom supervision to become skilled in presenting beginning reading instruction in a humane and efficient manner. This book cannot take the place of this type of training. What this book can do, however, is to help the teacher learn the specific details of what a code-emphasis approach reading program should include and to become aware of the specific teaching techniques that foster student attentiveness and success.

Key Terminology

Throughout these beginning chapters, we will use several key terms. The definition of these terms and an explanation of their importance follows.

Most Common Sounds

The most common sound of a letter is the sound that a letter most usually represents when it appears in a short, one-syllable word, such as man or bed. Table 5.1 lists the most common sound of each of the 26 letters. The word next to each letter illustrates the most common sound of that particular letter.

Table 5.3 Most Common Sounds of Single Letters

| <u>Continuous Sounds</u> | | <u>Stop Sounds</u> | |
|--------------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| a | fat | b | boy |
| e | bet | c | can |
| f | fill | d | did |
| i | sit | g | got |
| l | let | h | his |
| m | mad | j | jet |
| n | nut | k | kiss |
| o | not | p | pet |
| r | rat | q | quit |
| s | sell | t | top |
| u | cut | x | fox |
| v | vet | | |
| w | wet | | |
| y | yes | | |
| z | zoo | | |

Stop Sounds vs. Continuous Sounds

A continuous sound is a sound that can be said for several seconds without distorting the sound. A stop sound can be said for only an instant. Words beginning with a stop sound are more difficult for students to sound out than words beginning with a continuous sound. For example, the word pad is more difficult to sound out for beginning readers than the word sad because pad begins with a stop sound. Because of the difference, a slightly different procedure is used when the teacher presents stop sounds than is used to teach continuous sounds. The list in Table 5.1 designates which letters correspond to stop sounds and which letters correspond to continuous sounds.

Regular Words

A regular word is any word in which each letter represents its respective, most common sound. For example, the words am, cat, mud, best, and flag are regular words because each letter represents its most common sound.

Irregular Words

During the beginning reading stage, any word in which one or more letters does not represent its most common sound will be considered an irregular word. The word *was* is irregular because the letters **a** and **s** do not represent their most common sounds.

Consonant Blends

A consonant blend occurs when two or three consonants appear consecutively in a word and each consonant represents its most common sound. Consonant blends may appear at the beginning or end of words. Table 5.2 illustrates common initial-and final-consonant blends. Words that begin with consonant blends are more difficult to decode than words that begin with single consonants. An initial-consonant blend that contains a stop sound will make a word more difficult to decode than will a consonant blend with two continuous sounds.

| Table 5.4 Consonant Blends | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|--|---------------------------------------|--------|--|----|---------------|--|----|-------|--|-----|--------|--|
| <i>Initial-Consonant Blends</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Two-letter Blends Continuous Sounds First | | | Two-letter Blends Stop Sound First | | | | Three Letters | | | | | | | |
| fl | flag | | sc | scat | | bl | black | | pl | plug | | scr | scrap | |
| fr | frog | | sk | skip | | br | brat | | pr | press | | spl | split | |
| sl | slip | | sp | spin | | cl | clip | | tr | truck | | spr | spring | |
| sm | smack | | sq | square | | cr | crust | | tw | twin | | str | strap | |
| sn | snip | | st | stop | | dr | drip | | | | | | | |
| sw | swell | | | | | gl | glass | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | gr | grass | | | | | | | |

| <i>Final-Consonant Blends</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------|--|---------------------------------------|-------|--|----|---------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Two-letter Blends Continuous Sounds First | | | Two-letter Blends Stop Sound First | | | | Three Letters | | | | | | | |
| ft | left | | nd | blend | | ct | fact | | | | | Words formed by adding an s to two-letter blends (e.g., belts, facts) | | |
| ld | held | | nk | bank | | pt | kept | | | | | | | |
| lk | milk | | nt | bent | | xt | text | | | | | | | |
| lp | help | | sk | mask | | bs | cabs | | | | | | | |
| lt | belt | | st | west | | ds | beds | | | | | | | |
| mp | lamp | | ls | fills | | gs | rags | | | | | | | |
| ms | hams | | | | | ps | hips | | | | | | | |
| ns | cans | | | | | ts | bets | | | | | | | |

Regular Word Types

Regular word types may be described by the patterns of vowels and consonants they contain. Table 5.3 lists word types in their relative order of difficulty. In the first column, the letters V and C are used to describe the various types. V stands for vowel and C stands for consonant. A CVC word begins with a consonant letter, followed by a vowel, and another consonant. The words sat is a CVC word since s is a consonant, a is a vowel, and t is a consonant. The second

column indicates the reason for the word type's relative difficulty. The third column illustrates each word type. This table provides general guidelines, not hard and fast rules for the teaching of each word type. Some students may find words of an earlier type more difficult than words of a latter type.

Table 5.5 Simple Regular Words-Listed According to Difficulty

| Word Type | Reason for Relative Difficulty/Ease | Examples | Notes |
|--|---|----------------------------|--|
| VC and CVC words that begin with continuous sound. | Words begin with a continuous sounds. | it, fan | VC and CVC are grouped together because there are few VC words. |
| VCC and CVCC words that begin with a continuous sound. | Words are longer and end with a consonant blend. | lamp, ask | VCC and CVCC are grouped together because there are few VCC words. |
| CVC words that begin with stop sound | Words begin with a stop sound. | cup, tin | |
| CVCC words that begin with stop sound. | Words begin with stop sound and end with a consonant blend. | dust, hand | |
| CCVC | Words begin with a consonant blend. | crib, blend snap, flat | Words that begin with two continuous consonants are the easier of words that begin with blends. These words are grouped with the rest of the blends since there are relatively few such words. |
| CCVC, CCCVC, and CCCVCC | Words are longer. | clamp, spent, scrap scrimp | |

An Overview of Decoding Instruction--Beginning Stage

During the beginning stage, the major part of instruction revolves around teaching students how to decode regular words. We recommend teaching students an overt strategy of sounding out words. **In sounding out**, the students start at the beginning of the word and say the sound corresponding to the first letter. **They then advance in a left-right progression, saying the sound for each successive letter and blending the sounds without pausing.** The blending results in a word such as Sam being sounded as "Sssssaaaaammmmm." Finally the blended word is said at a normal rate "Sam."

The following are pres-kills that help students to sound out words:

1. A knowledge of letter-sound correspondences in the word. (Note that word reading can begin as soon as the students know enough sounds of letters to form words. The students need not master all letter-sound correspondences before word reading begins.)
2. The ability to orally blend a series of sounds in which each sound is held several seconds with no pause (e.g., the teacher says "mmaaaannn" and the student says "mmaaaannn").
3. The ability to translate a series of connected sounds into a meaningful word (e.g., the teacher says "mmaaan" and the student says "man").

The imitating and translating skills are auditory skills. They can be presented verbally without any reference to printed material. The first week of instruction will consist primarily of letter-sound correspondence and auditory-skill training. Sounding-out instruction can begin when the students know four to six letter-sound correspondences. The first sounding-out exercises are word-list

exercises in which the teacher points to the letters in a word while the students say and blend the sounds, then say the word at a normal rate.

When the students demonstrate mastery on teacher-prompted sounding out, the teacher introduces sounding-out exercises in which the students point to the letters as they blend sounds in a word that appears on a worksheet page.

Passage reading, in which the students read stories composed of words taught in word-list exercises, begins with passages that are just one sentences in length. The length of stories and the time devoted to passage reading grows gradually until, near the end of the beginning stage, almost two-thirds of decoding instruction focuses on passage reading.

A gradual transition is made over a period of weeks from sounding out to sight-word reading in which the students do not vocally sound out a word before saying it at a normal rate.

Initial word-reading exercises are done with regular VC and CVC words that begin with continuous sounds. More difficult regular word types are introduced only when students demonstrate mastery of easier types. Irregular words, words in which one or more letters do not represent their most common sound, are not introduced until students have developed ease in sounding out regular words.

In summary, decoding instruction begins with the teacher presenting component skills that students will need when reading words. The teacher presents letter-sound correspondences and auditory skills that students will employ when reading words. The initial word-reading instruction involves the teacher instructing the students how to sound out regular words. A gradual transition is made from exercises in which students vocally sound out words with a good deal of teacher prompting to later exercises in which students read words independently without vocally sounding them out. The key teacher behavior is to provide students with adequate practice to facilitate high accuracy before proceeding to new steps.

Comprehension

During the first year of reading instruction, the words students will be able to read will represent only a small fraction of the words in the students' expressive and receptive vocabulary. Text comprehension exercises are limited to relatively simple, literal, and inferential questions. Comprehension instruction on a wider range of topics can and should be presented verbally. All students can benefit from oral instruction in a wider range of comprehension and vocabulary skills than can be presented in written exercises.

The type and quantity of comprehension instruction during the beginning reading stage depends on the entering skills of the children. Since the words introduced in most commercial reading programs are selected to be within the vocabulary of the average child, relatively little work needs to be done on these words with most students. Comprehension teaching for instructionally sophisticated students can consist of oral training in reasoning skills and more sophisticated vocabulary.

At-risk students, however, may require a great deal of teaching of basic vocabulary and expressive language. They will not know the meaning of words encountered in primary reading books. Equally important, they may not understand many terms teachers commonly use during instruction. To prepare these students for the tasks they will encounter, a teacher should provide instruction in basic language and vocabulary. Early lessons should include instruction in various attributes of objects such as color, shape, texture, and size, labels for common classroom objects, use of comparatives and superlatives, pronoun usage, and prepositions.

In summary, oral-language training during the beginning reading stage will benefit all students, but it is especially critical for instructionally naive students. Without extensive oral training, these students are likely to have serious problems with later comprehension activities.