The Power of Evidence-Based **LITERACY INSTRUCTION**

The Power of Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction

Lisa Holliday LeBoeuf, Ed.D

Literacy Faculty Lead

OXFORD TEACHERS COLLEGE, REACH UNIVERSITY

Dr. LeBoeuf is professor and course developer at Oxford Teachers College, specializing in literacy and communications courses. She previously served as the Supervisor of Literacy Professional Development for the LDOE. Overall, Dr. LeBoeuf has more than 15 years of educational experience. She earned a Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Imagine you are a fourth-grade science teacher. Many of your students this year are not succeeding despite your best efforts. You soon discover that over half of your class struggles with reading. Your students' ability (or inability) to read directly affects their success with the science textbook and curriculum. As we know, reading is not just important for a grade in English class. Reading is an essential skill and is a crucial component of developing literacy. Literacy impacts other academic subjects and areas of life. Educators can support success in literacy by understanding how students learn to read and keeping best practices for instruction at the forefront of teaching.

This paper focuses on the critical topic of literacy. It begins by identifying why students have difficulty learning to read, and discusses typical reading development and the importance of reading instruction. Educators will learn the five components that support high-quality reading instruction. Research-based best practices for all students will be reviewed, along with differentiating instruction to meet student needs. The paper concludes by addressing administrators' vital role in implementing high-quality literacy instruction and best practices.

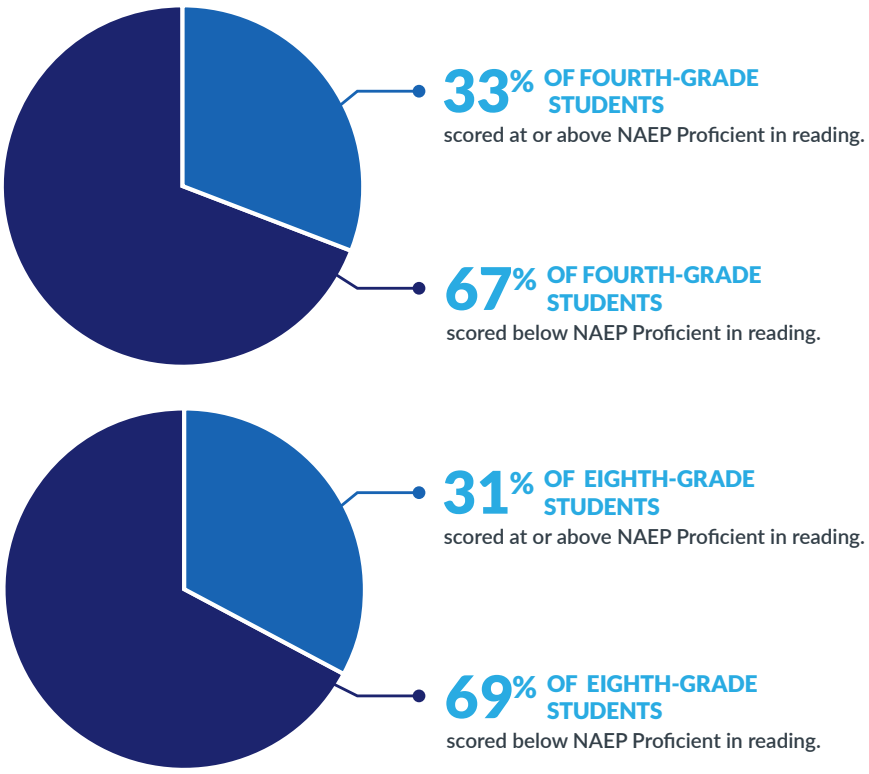
Table of Contents

Importance of Literacy Instruction

Reading is not just an elementary skill, and reading instruction is not limited to students in kindergarten through second grade. Reading impacts all school subjects, grade levels, and content areas. Without fluent reading and comprehension skills, students struggle to solve problems, analyze and apply vocabulary knowledge, and use contextual clues to determine meanings and concepts.

The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment in reading showed that 33% of fourth-grade students scored at or above NAEP Proficient in reading. This percentage means that 67% of fourth-grade students scored below NAEP Proficient in reading. Similar results appeared with eighth-grade students, with only 31% of eighth-grade students scoring at or above NAEP Proficient in reading. This indicates that 69% of eighth-grade students scored below NAEP Proficient in reading (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.). We can conclude that the majority of students are not achieving a NAEP Proficient score in reading.

2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)



Students who struggle with reading also frequently experience academic, social, and emotional issues. This struggle with reading impacts society in various ways (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2022). Focusing on literacy is imperative for the future of each student and society.

The effects of a worldwide pandemic have impacted reading instruction, reading acquisition, and learning in general. Students are experiencing what experts call "interrupted learning" or "learning loss." These terms have been mentioned more often since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Reading instruction and activities grounded in literacy best practices can support struggling readers at all grade levels and address the impact of interrupted learning.

In fact, it's no secret that systematic, explicit literacy instruction is essential for all students. While there is much research and discussion on the different methodologies through which reading is taught, it is clear that the most effective approach involves evidence-based practices. We will explore some of these widely used best practices, but first, we will start with understanding reading development.

unique™ learning system

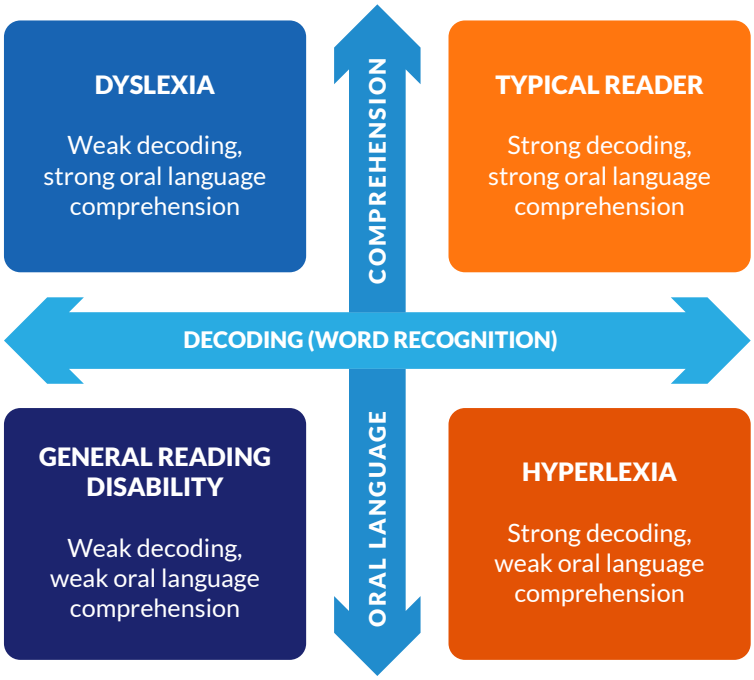
With teaching and learning content for reading and other core subjects, Unique Learning System provides comprehensive and current academic and life skills instruction for pre-K through transition. Teachers can deliver standards-aligned, research-based reading instruction at the right level of support to reach unique learners at all levels and help them achieve their greatest possible gains.

Reading Development

How children learn to read is complex, and it is important for teachers to understand the process of reading development. The most important thing to remember is that the process of fluent reading is like a math equation. Two values are required to be fluent in reading comprehension—accurate decoding skills and strong language comprehension skills. To achieve reading comprehension, a student must have both values (decoding and language comprehension). If one value is missing, the equation equals zero, meaning the student cannot be a successful reader and lacks the skills to understand what they are reading.

Visual adaptation of the Simple View of Reading by Gough and Tunmer (1986).

Applying this equation to characteristics of reading development helps identify students' reading abilities. With that knowledge, teachers can provide instructional literacy practices that support individual student needs and help improve reading skills.



Visual adaptation of the Simple View of Reading by Gough and Tunmer (1986)

As shown in the graphic, students with strong word recognition and language comprehension skills are considered typical readers. Students who can decode but struggle to comprehend may be at risk for hyperlexia or poor oral language comprehension skills. Learners who struggle in both areas may have a general reading disability, while students who comprehend oral language but struggle to decode fluently are at risk for dyslexia (Farrell et al., 2019). Accurate identification of student reading abilities can drive decisions for literacy instruction.

Orthographic Mapping

Typical readers with strong word recognition and language comprehension skills naturally develop the ability to decode, read, and comprehend words to read and understand sentences. This process is called orthographic mapping.

Orthographic mapping is not something a teacher can physically observe. It is the process of what occurs in the brain as a child learns to read and store information. Words are made up of phonemes (sounds), graphemes (letters), and meaning (vocabulary). The process of orthographic mapping connects those three pieces, stores them in the brain, and builds a bank of vocabulary sight words that students can access to build fluency and comprehension (Sedita, 2020). This process is seamless and automatic for typical readers.

Learners who struggle to read fluently experience a breakdown during the orthographic mapping process. They cannot perform reading tasks with automaticity. Struggling readers need additional support to fill the gaps in their orthographic mapping processes.

The following sections detail these processes and provide information for teachers and leaders that will support their knowledge-building and training to ensure that literacy instruction is effective and lasting.

Five Components of Reading Instruction

How can teachers make sure their students are receiving high-quality literacy instruction? There are so many moving parts in learning to read and reading to learn that it can be overwhelming to think of everything that must be taught. However, there are five key components of literacy that support reading. And it is important that these components be taught in a systematic, explicit way.

Systematic means there is a logical sequence in which skills are taught, and the skills build on each other to create a foundation that supports future reading instruction (Cowen, 2016). Explicit teaching is direct, clear, and focused on a specific progression of skills. It can involve multiple practices and methods to ensure students acquire skills.

Systematic and explicit instruction are needed to ensure students orthographically map sounds and words accurately and efficiently. When reading instruction is systematic and explicit, it provides profoundly effective and meaningful instruction for student learning centered around the five literacy components: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Here is a brief look at each of the five components of literacy and how they support reading.

1. Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize individual sounds and sound patterns in spoken language, which is a natural skill set for some children, but others may require additional support.

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term encompassing skills that develop on a continuum, such as rhyming, identifying syllables, onset-rime, and phoneme-level manipulation, including blending, segmenting, adding, deleting, substituting, and reversing sounds in words (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, n.d.). These skills begin developing before grade school, so exposing children to language-rich environments in preschool and early childhood environments can set them up to be successful in grade school.

2. Phonics

Phonics adds in the letter, or grapheme, representation for sounds. Some sounds are spelled with more than one letter, such as *ch* or *igh*, and those spellings and sound associations can be taught systematically. Most curricula have a scope and sequence for teaching sounds and spelling patterns or phoneme-grapheme mapping.

To ensure students receive the most impactful literacy instruction, teachers can learn more about the instructional continuums of phonological awareness skills and phonics lessons. This awareness will ensure their instruction aligns with evidence-based research.

3. Fluency

Fluency refers to reading and comprehending text with ease and accuracy. Another feature of fluent reading is automaticity. Reading with automaticity means that strong readers automatically, without realizing it, recognize and process the letters in words and words in a text that put concepts and ideas together in ways that make sense, so they focus on comprehension (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Students' orthographic mapping skills are strong, which means they can store and retrieve words and meanings rapidly enough to understand concepts as they read.

4. Vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction can be truly impactful when it is direct and explicit. Students who benefit from instruction that grows their vocabulary can learn new concepts and skills and build background knowledge more efficiently (Catts et al., 2014). Learning and applying vocabulary skills help students gain meaning from what they are reading and use that knowledge across content areas (Sedita, 2005).

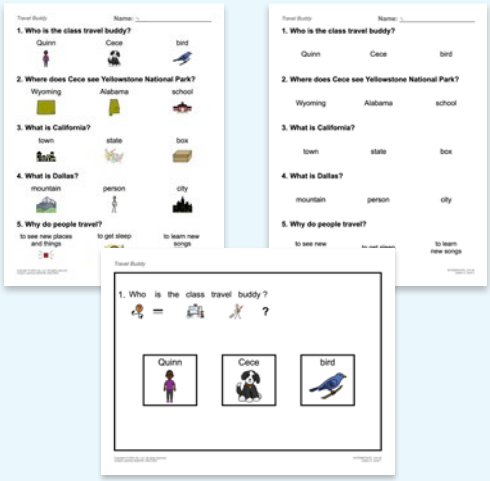
Teachers can provide vocabulary instruction on words that students may find challenging before reading a text and on words that are content-specific during the reading of a text. This type of instruction can support the process in students' brains that analyzes, stores, and retrieves words when needed.

5. Comprehension

Comprehension is a broad term that means understanding, and comprehension is integral to each preceding reading skill. Being able to decode words, read with fluency, and remember vocabulary words are all important skills. Strong comprehension skills ensure that readers can internalize and apply learned skills to new concepts and words. When students comprehend what they read, they build their knowledge about the text's content and can share that knowledge with others (Catts et al., 2014).

An important distinction to remember about comprehension is that skills differ from strategies. There are various comprehension strategies that support the development of comprehension skills. Some common strategies that can support all learners are identifying the main idea and details, summarizing, making inferences, questioning, and retelling (IRIS Center, 2022). Pairing comprehension strategies with graphic organizers can be a useful practice to develop and strengthen comprehension skills.

When educators invest in building their own knowledge of the components of reading, they can provide additional value to their reading instruction. Beginning with the identification of reading deficits, educators can use their expertise to design instructional strategies, provide accommodations, and further differentiate the curriculum if needed. These efforts can have a positive impact on student outcomes. Reading instruction that is centered on evidence-based instructional literacy practices ensures all students have opportunities to become successful, lifelong readers.



unique™ learning system

From preschool to transition, Unique Learning System is a complete reading program that includes the five components of reading instruction. Scaffolded lessons differentiated for three levels of ability allow students to learn at their level with repeated exposure to high-frequency words, vocabulary and key concepts, phonics/early reading instruction, nonfiction/informational text, and thematic units that cover a full range of reading and ELA standards.

What Do Evidence-Based Practices in Literacy Instruction Look Like?

Evidence-based practices are shown to result in positive student outcomes as demonstrated in multiple studies. Simply put, there is evidence to support that these practices work. However, some types of literacy instruction are frequently overlooked. They include activities that build phonological and phonemic awareness, explicit instruction of phonics and high-frequency words, intentional teaching of vocabulary, and direct instruction of the writing process.

Phonological Awareness Instruction

Phonological and phonemic awareness skills develop students' abilities to distinguish sounds in words, leading to stronger decoding and encoding skills. Struggling readers often have deficits in these areas and may benefit from additional instruction, so when teachers offer ample systematic phonological awareness instruction, they provide the foundation for successful reading development.

Phonics Instruction

Explicit phonics instruction connects the knowledge of the sounds that make words to the letters and spelling patterns that correlate with the sounds. The English language has 44 phonemes or sounds, but multiple spelling patterns, or graphemes, can represent each sound. As a result, explicit, systematic instruction is imperative so students can orthographically map phoneme-grapheme correspondences and apply learned skills to bigger words and varied texts.

High-frequency words are an important piece of the phonics puzzle, too. There has been some debate on the instruction of high-frequency words, often referred to as sight words. The main takeaway is that any word can be a sight word, and high-frequency words are words that are seen often throughout texts.

Many words on high-frequency word lists, such as *see*, *in*, *how*, and *that*, are decodable and can be taught that way. Words that follow irregular spelling patterns, such as *was*, *there*, *you*, and *of*, can be taught as sight words or high-frequency words. Sight words have irregular spellings that need to be memorized and applied, such as the "o" in of making the short "u" sound. Once a word has been stored in a student's memory and can be recognized by sight, it becomes a sight word. Even words like *phenomenon* and *efficiency* become sight words once someone recognizes and reads them automatically.

Vocabulary Instruction

Learning to decode words, especially when the skills advance into morphology in which word parts, origins, roots, and bases are taught, supports vocabulary acquisition. Knowing how word elements make up words helps students determine the meanings of words. So providing intentional, direct instruction in vocabulary is essential to building a student's word bank.

Practices such as memorizing vocabulary words and definitions are not as helpful as making connections and deeply understanding the meanings of word parts. Vocabulary knowledge accounts for a large piece of the difference between good readers and developing readers because readers with strong word knowledge can make sense of what they read (Sedita, 2005).

Direct, intentional vocabulary instruction involves using context to provide definitions, actively engaging students in deciphering word parts and meanings, and providing multiple exposures to content about the word. The more students read, the more words they learn, so empowering them with the skills to decode words and meanings gives them the ability and confidence to read and learn.

Writing Instruction

When we spend time teaching students about writing, it can also lead them to further success in reading fluency and comprehension. Writing is the application of all learned skills. Students need direct instruction in writing to ensure they understand the processes required to organize, develop, and compose thoughts and ideas.

Actively monitoring and providing feedback to students on their writing will promote success. Feedback may be given individually or in small groups through writing conferences or by dropping in at students' work areas to provide on-site feedback and support. Teachers can scaffold writing instruction based on students' needs so that students on different levels of skill acquisition can receive differentiated instruction and assignments tailored to their instructional levels, setting them up to be successful.

An empowered literacy community can be created when the elements of effective literacy instruction build and strengthen reading and writing skills!

Research-Based Reading Practices

In addition to different types of instruction, many research-based reading best practices benefit all students. These activities and practices can be incorporated into whole-class instruction, small groups, or independent learning times. As with instructional methodologies, these tools and practices are most effective with teacher modeling, monitoring, and feedback.

The key to the successful implementation of any instructional practice is to provide direct instruction, time to practice, and opportunities for feedback and reflection. These components are supported by research and demonstrate how practices and strategies used in other approaches can be shifted to impact student learning.

The key to the successful implementation of any instructional practice is to provide direct instruction, time to practice, and opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers provide an excellent way for students to brainstorm ideas, organize thoughts, and explore topics. There are different kinds of graphic organizers that can be used in various ways. Graphic organizers can be used as part of the writing process to organize ideas about a selected topic or as a stand-alone activity to synthesize information.

Graphic organizers are simple tools that can be helpful for students who struggle with writing, such as those with dysgraphia or impaired handwriting abilities, and executive functioning problems (Osen-Foss, 2016). The organizers can help break tasks or assignments into smaller, more manageable chunks that students can process more easily. Providing students with a graphic organizer can give them the tools and confidence they need to complete learning tasks effectively.

It is helpful to students when educators explicitly teach how to use graphic organizers by modeling the process and making expectations clear for students. As with all other techniques, monitoring and providing feedback are key elements to successful instruction implementation.

Read-Alouds with Dialogic Questioning

Read-alouds are a powerful tool for any age and grade level. Listening comprehension skills are essential for language development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Read-alouds can expose students to new vocabulary, diverse topics, and compelling concepts. Including dialogic questioning as part of the read-aloud process will enhance students' comprehension and retention of the text.

Dialogic questioning involves asking open-ended questions about the text or concepts within the text to promote deep thinking and conversation among peers. These questions can be challenging and even philosophical, but there are no right or wrong answers (National Park Service Interpretive Development Program, 2018). They are meant to get students thinking deeply and increase engagement in the text. Dialogic questioning can be adapted to any grade level or text. Plus, it can help students who struggle with comprehension process minor pieces of information and text more efficiently.

Shared and Guided Reading

Shared reading experiences can enhance comprehension by allowing students to hear peers read using expression and prosody. For example, learners can support each other by discussing vocabulary, reflecting on topics, and asking and answering questions.

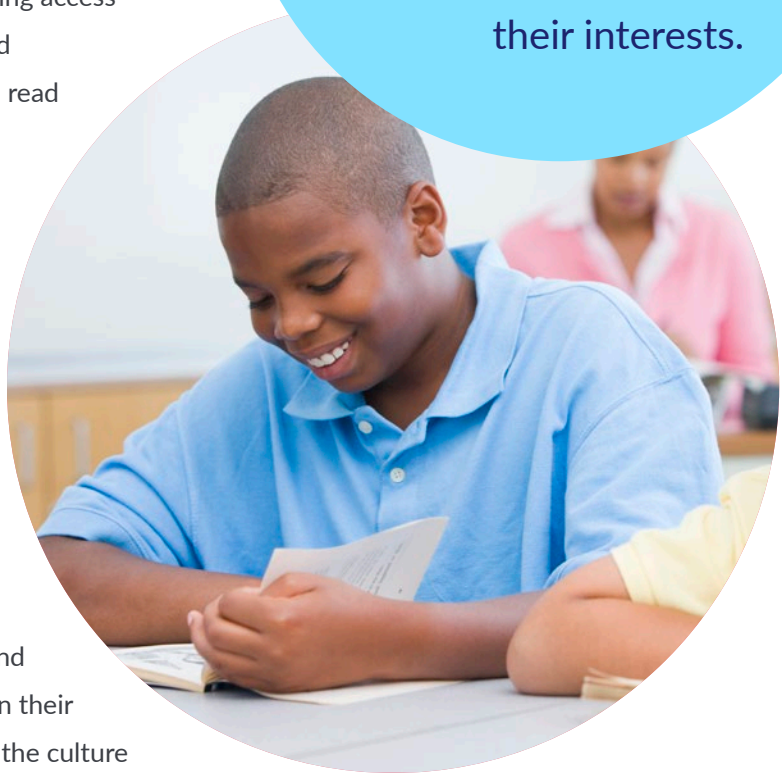
Guided reading can be beneficial when used effectively. It can be a way to differentiate instruction by allowing students to practice reading skills with guidance from a teacher or skilled peer (Burkins & Croft, 2010). This strategy groups students based on their instructional reading levels. When coupled with feedback and focused on speaking and listening standards, guided reading can support struggling readers and serve as a bridge to reading success.

Self-Selected Reading

Allowing students opportunities to practice reading skills using books they select themselves can promote the joy of reading that all teachers hope to instill in their students. When students are interested in what they are reading, they are more likely to remain engaged, finish the book, and select more books to read based on their interests. Student engagement, interest, and confidence are reliable predictors of academic achievement and persistence (Shanahan, 2018).

When students are interested in what they are reading, they are more likely to remain engaged, finish the book, and select more books to read based on their interests.

Teachers can ensure students avoid frustration by providing access to books with diverse topics, multicultural characters, and various reading levels. Students should be encouraged to read at or slightly above their instructional reading level (International Dyslexia Association, 2018).



Encouraging students to read purely for enjoyment is beneficial. Teachers can also track progress and monitor comprehension by facilitating a collaborative learning environment and asking students to share what they learned through presentations or other creative expressions. Students can use a reading log to track what they have read and complete comprehension activities such as summaries, main ideas, and details activities. Graphic organizers can be used to put topics and story elements in order. Teachers can embrace diversity in their classrooms by using routines and strategies that support the culture of their classrooms and students.

Representation Matters

Inclusive instruction means planning and providing instructional materials that include a variety of races, cultures, genders, situations, and family structures. Seeing themselves and the experiences of others represented equally throughout their learning helps students feel accepted and seen and builds a sense of community.

Instructional Methodologies

The methodologies by which reading should be taught are equally as important as the components of literacy themselves. Different instructional methodologies impact learning in different ways. Students benefit from being exposed to various types of instruction that follow systematic, explicit routines and strategies.

Introduction to Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is needed when teaching a new concept or skill. Phonological awareness and phonics skills are best taught with direct instruction because they follow a continuum of developmental skills. Direct vocabulary instruction gives students the foundation to apply and extend their understanding of words and meanings. And direct instruction in fluency and comprehension can provide examples of proper intonation, expression, and responses to punctuation to help students become fluent and expressive readers. Some forms of direct instruction that yield positive results and strong engagement for students include modeling, teacher-led discussions, and using graphic organizers.

Some forms of direct instruction that yield positive results and strong engagement for students include modeling, teacher-led discussions, and using graphic organizers.

TEACHER MODELING

Teacher modeling is a tool that provides explicit representation to help students improve their skills. For example, modeling phonological awareness skills might involve demonstrating how to move the mouth when making a letter sound. Modeling phonics could include showing students how to write a letter by skywriting or using a whiteboard. Vocabulary modeling could be acting out a word or showing students how to use a word in a sentence.

An essential step in the modeling process is to allow students to echo the model. Modeling, along with other direct instruction techniques, follows an "I do, we do, you do" progression, also known as gradual release of responsibility. The teacher models first, then the teacher and students do it together, then the students do it while the teacher monitors and provides feedback.

TEACHER-LED INSTRUCTION

Teacher-led instruction and discussion can improve conversation skills and dialogue among peers. Teachers can lead a conversation about the topic or skills being taught and ask questions throughout the discussion to prompt students to think critically.

Providing students time to think and share with a partner or small group can enhance skill acquisition and the sense of community in a classroom. It is helpful for teachers to monitor conversations and ensure students stay on topic. Teachers can accomplish this by dropping in and listening to partner discussions and having students share what they discussed together with the whole class. Providing feedback and using student responses to extend questions or ideas helps students feel confident in their discussion skills and promotes participation.

Instructional Settings

Direct instruction is effective in whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings. Providing instruction in various settings is important and appropriate at certain times and for different reasons. The figure depicts the purposes and appropriate structures for whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction.

WHOLE GROUP

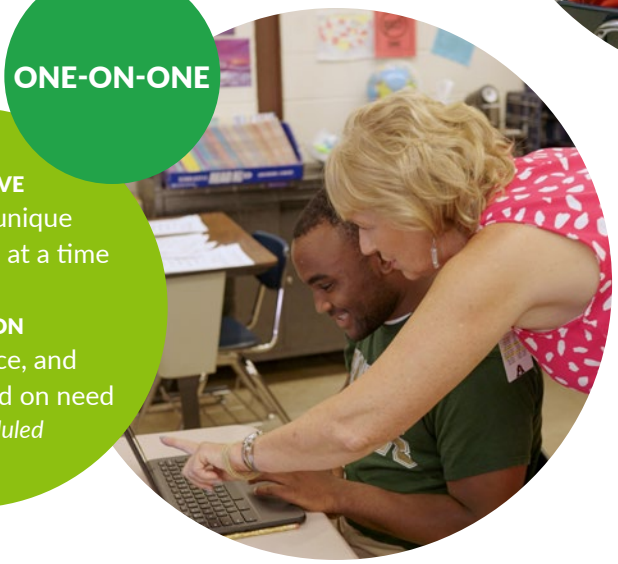
OBJECTIVE
Teach a new concept or skill

DURATION
15–20 minutes
or as scheduled

SMALL GROUP

OBJECTIVE
Review or reteach a concept or skill

DURATION
5–15 minutes
or as scheduled



ONE-ON-ONE

OBJECTIVE
Target one unique concept or skill at a time

DURATION
Minutes, pace, and frequency based on need
or as scheduled

Interactive Instruction

The most engaging instruction is interactive by being inclusive of all students and learning styles. Incorporating various modes of learning into daily literacy instruction can help teachers ensure access and equitable practices are provided for all students.

Technology can support teachers and promote student success when used effectively and with fidelity. There are many programs, apps, websites, and other digital resources available to meet the needs of all students. Less tech-y options for increasing interaction during lessons can be just as fun and give students and teachers a break from screen time. Dry erase boards and markers, colorful index cards, manipulatives, hand motions, or other forms of movement can increase engagement and help students make multisensory connections to learning.

Interactive techniques are appropriate for all grade levels and all types of learners. Incorporating multisensory practices in reading lessons can increase students' skill retention and strengthen their working memory (Shams & Seitz, 2008). While multisensory activities can benefit all learners, using multisensory programs and practices is highly encouraged for students who struggle to read or may have dyslexia (International Dyslexia Association, n.d.). Using various senses to learn activates areas of the brain that impact reading acquisition. Interactive lessons make learning more fun, and the activity improves students' physical, mental, and emotional connections.

Independent Practice

Whole-class instruction, small-group opportunities, and interactive learning are all effective strategies to support reading lessons. Students also need time to practice and apply learned skills independently. By allowing time for independent practice, teachers can observe and assess whether individual students have gained the necessary skills or whether they need additional support or reteaching. Independent study gives students the opportunity to work through their thought processes and learn in ways that work for them.

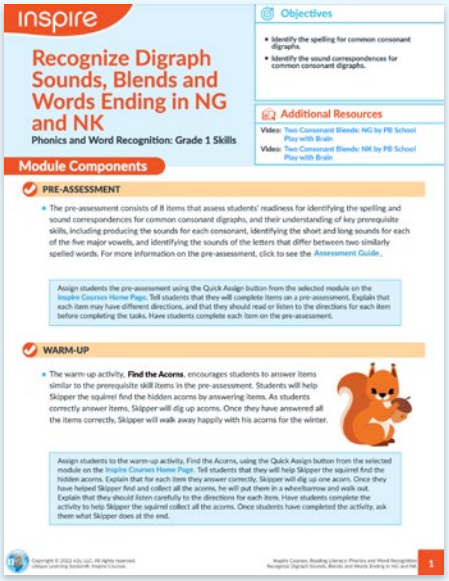
Productive struggle can help students figure out what parts of a lesson or skill they may need clarification on. Plus, productive struggle also allows learners the space to formulate and ask questions they may not have felt comfortable asking in a whole-group setting. Independent learning is a preferred method for some students, so it is important to ensure there is ample time for all types of learners to access their strengths.

Feedback

Through all types of instruction and learning, it is useful to embed opportunities for teachers and students to respond and provide feedback. Asking and answering questions, monitoring student work, and providing constructive, timely feedback are all critical parts of a lesson. These lesson elements provide a sense of closure by ensuring individual student needs are met. Constructive responses also improve communication among peers and between teachers and students. Another benefit of constructive responses is that they can help establish a sense of community in a classroom.

Differentiating Reading Instruction

Differentiation is a way to customize learning experiences for students based on their individual needs. Because it is an individual approach, it supports equitable teaching and learning practices. Differentiation can be provided to all learners, such as advanced readers, struggling readers, students with dyslexia, and students who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).


inspire

Recognize Digraph Sounds, Blends and Words Ending in NG and NK

Phonics and Word Recognition: Grade 1 Skills

Objectives

- Identify the spelling for common consonant digraphs.
- Identify the sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs.

Additional Resources

Video: Two Consonant Blends: NG by PB School Play with Brain

Video: Two Consonant Blends: NK by PB School Play with Brain

Module Components

PRE-ASSESSMENT

- The pre-assessment consists of 8 items that assess students' readiness for identifying the spelling and sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs, and their understanding of key prerequisite skills, including producing the sounds for each consonant, identifying the short and long sounds for each of the five major vowels, and identifying the sounds of the letters that differ between two similarly spelled words. For more information on the pre-assessment, click to see the Assessment Guide.

Assign students the pre-assessment using the Quick Assign button from the selected module on the Inspire Courses Home Page. Tell students that they will complete items on a pre-assessment. Explain that each item may have different directions, and that they should read or listen to the directions for each item before completing the tasks. Have students complete each item on the pre-assessment.

WARM-UP

- The warm-up activity, **Find the Acorns**, encourages students to answer items similar to the prerequisite skill items in the pre-assessment. Students will help Skipper the squirrel find the hidden acorns by answering items. As students correctly answer items, Skipper will dig up acorns. Once they have answered all the items correctly, Skipper will walk away happily with his acorns for the winter.

Assign students to the warm-up activity, Find the Acorns, using the Quick Assign button from the selected module on the Inspire Courses Home Page. Tell students that they will help Skipper the squirrel find the hidden acorns. Explain that for each item they answer correctly, Skipper will dig up one acorn. Once they have helped Skipper find and collect all the acorns, he will put them in a wheelbarrow and walk out. Explain that they should listen carefully to the directions for each item. Have students complete the activity to help Skipper the squirrel collect all the acorns. Once students have completed the activity, ask them what Skipper does at the end.

1

inspire

With Inspire, teachers meet the needs of all learners through a research- and evidence-based instructional design that incorporates differentiated materials aligned to general education standards. Step-by-step instructional guidance ensures teachers and staff have evidence-based strategies to reach students at each level. Plus, students will make greater progress toward their goals as they complete the differentiated activities that include scaffolding for a variety of abilities.

Advanced Readers

Students with advanced reading skills are often overlooked in a classroom setting because they already perform strongly. Advanced readers also benefit from differentiated instruction to support their continued learning and growth as readers and critical thinkers. There are ways to differentiate learning for students who have well-developed literacy skills. Some ideas are listed below.

EXAMPLES

- Provide challenging activities and adjust as needed
- Give opportunities for students to serve as peer mentors
- Allow students with similar abilities time to work together
- Change groups based on student needs and the results of progress monitoring
- Provide activity options to promote interests and foster independence

Struggling Readers

Readers who struggle with literacy skills do so for different reasons. Some students may not have much experience or access to books and reading experiences, so their ability to learn to read and comprehend could be affected. Students may also have difficulties with their speech and language development, including English language learners, or they may have visual or hearing impairments that affect their ability to learn to read.

Many students who struggle to read have poorly developed decoding or phonological awareness skills, which can present additional challenges when those needs are not addressed early on. There are many ways to provide additional support to struggling readers, including the ones listed below.

EXAMPLES

- Give additional instruction and support on targeted skills
- Use approaches that are systematic and explicit
- Monitor progress consistently
- Adjust instruction as needed
- Keep groups flexible to allow students to enter and exit a group based on their needs

Students with Dyslexia

Students with dyslexia require additional instruction and practice, just like learners who struggle to read. There are numerous ways to support students with dyslexia in the classroom. Several examples are listed below.

EXAMPLES

- Gather data to serve as a baseline of student ability
- Provide targeted instruction and activities
- Incorporate multisensory activities
- Pair students with a peer mentor
- Provide additional time for task/assignment completion

Readers with Adverse Childhood Experiences

The beauty of literacy instruction is that many instructional strategies lend themselves to supporting students academically and emotionally. Students who have endured adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can significantly benefit from various literacy strategies, including those listed below.

EXAMPLES

- Encourage self-expression through writing/creative activities
- Incorporate songs and poems as writing techniques
- Model appropriate language and styles
- Use graphic organizers for expressive learning
- Help students choose topics that lead to creative writing
- Invite community members to interact with students to build a support network

For all students, including those who have experienced ACEs, equity is a significant factor in differentiated literacy practices. Being equitable promotes diversity and gives each student the necessary access and materials. Equity can look different for each student based on their needs and can be adjusted as needs change.

Specially Designed Instruction for Students with IEPs

As mentioned earlier, literacy skills are imperative in both school and life. Specially designed instruction (SDI) is a crucial part of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and helps students to achieve their goals related to reading and writing.

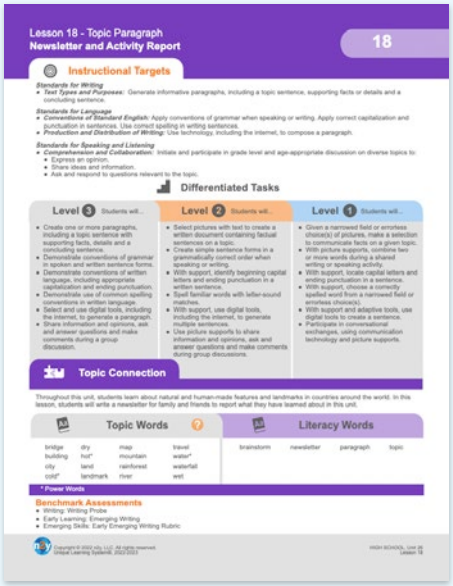
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines specially designed instruction as the following:

Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction:

(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and

(ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children

(U.S. Department of Education, 2017).



unique™ learning system

Grounded in multiple research- and evidence-based instructional methodologies, Unique Learning System is the perfect companion to specially designed instruction (SDI). Its grab-and-go lesson plans aligned to state standards, differentiated lessons and activities, and robust data and reporting streamline planning and implementation. Because teachers are freed to focus on individual needs and have resources that are proven to support SDI, students get exactly what they need to make academic progress and achieve IEP goals.

SDI is designed and delivered by a special education teacher or a related service provider to meet the unique needs of each student. It goes beyond the use of differentiated instruction and providing accommodations to students. SDI is individualized and helps to ensure progress is being made on the student's IEP goals and objectives. Making progress toward reading and writing goals will have a significant impact across all subjects. Some examples of literacy-centered SDI are listed below.

EXAMPLES

- Scaffolding instruction in reading
- Instruction in the use of mnemonic strategies
- Modeling the use of context clues
- Explicit instruction in the use of prewriting strategies
- Providing small-group instruction in decoding skills
- Delivering explicit instruction on how to use graphic organizers
- Instruction and modeling when using a KWL chart

Administrators' Role in Building a Support System

Administrators play a crucial role in the effective implementation of literacy best practices. School administrators serve as the responsible gatekeepers of their campuses to ensure their teachers and support personnel are supported and well-trained in high-quality literacy instruction grounded in research- and evidence-based practices. They also communicate with district-level administrators to develop and implement structured literacy plans that consider and set goals for all learners.

There are many ways administrators can support both students and teachers in using evidence-based reading practices, which promotes the development of students' literacy skills. This can be accomplished by scheduling daily time for instruction and strategically planning and placing personnel to maximize instructional minutes. Scheduling weekly or monthly time for teacher collaboration and professional

There are many ways administrators can support both students and teachers in using evidence-based reading practices, which promotes the development of students' literacy skills.

learning communities builds an internal system of support that can significantly enhance teacher and leader knowledge. Those times can provide space for teachers and leaders to share ideas and challenges, research solutions and strategies, and plan cohesive lessons and activities for diverse learners. Making literacy and collaboration joint priorities helps leaders facilitate a supportive, literacy-rich culture.

Teachers and support personnel who interact with students around reading, especially special education teachers, paraprofessionals, RTI interventionists, and ESL teachers, can be further supported by administrators in many ways. Providing teachers professional development in research- and evidence-based literacy practices may include external training opportunities. This training may involve learning to align reading instruction and instructional methodologies. A well-trained team builds sustainable capacity and enhances internal support systems for teachers and students.

Remembering the Relevance

Reading instruction grounded in evidence-based methodologies and practices is critical to reading success for all students. Integrating literacy practices and strategies across content areas and in students' daily schedules fosters a learning community that promotes a love for reading and learning.

Teachers at any grade level and any content area can have a supply of books and texts that reflect the students in their classrooms. Materials that embrace the student population's cultures, languages, reading levels, and interests support a sense of community and acceptance. Literacy is a valuable tool for making connections and building knowledge. Together, administrators, teachers, students, and families can develop partnerships and implement plans to ensure success for every learner every day.

Together, administrators, teachers, students, and families can develop partnerships and implement plans to ensure reading success for every learner every day.

REFERENCES

Burkins, J. M., & Croft, M. M. (2010). *Preventing misguided reading: New strategies for guided reading teachers* (2nd ed.). International Reading Association, Inc.

Catts, H. W., Nielsen, D. C., Bridges, M. S., & Liu, Y. (2014). Early identification of reading comprehension difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *49*(5), 451–465. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219414556121

The Children's Reading Foundation. (2022). *What's the impact?* Retrieved August 26, 2022, from https://www.readingfoundation.org/the-impact

Cowen, C. D. (2016). What is structured literacy? A primer on effective reading instruction. *International Dyslexia Association.* https://dyslexiaida.org/what-is-structured-literacy

Farrell, L., Hunter, M., Davidson, M., & Osenga, T. (2019). The simple view of reading. *Reading Rockets*. https://www.readingrockets.org/article/simple-view-reading

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, *7*(1), 6–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104

International Dyslexia Association. (n.d.). *Structured literacy: Effective instruction for students with dyslexia and related reading difficulties.* https://dyslexiaida.org/structured-literacy-effective-instruction-for-students-with-dyslexia-and-related-reading-difficulties

International Dyslexia Association. (2018). *Knowledge and practice standards for teachers of reading.* https://dyslexiaida.org/kps-for-teachers-of-reading

IRIS Center. (2022). Which study skills strategies can improve students' academic performance? *Perspectives & Resources: Comprehension Strategies.* Retrieved August 26, 2022, from https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ss2/cresource/q1/p03

Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Lewis, K., & Morton, E. (2022). The pandemic has had devastating impacts on learning. What will it take to help students catch up? *Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard.* https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up

The Nation's Report Card. (n.d.). *NAEP report card: Reading assessment.* Retrieved November 10, 2022, from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=4

National Park Service Interpretive Development Program. (2018). *Dialogic questions.* Common Learning Portal. https://mylearning.nps.gov/library-resources/dialogic-questions

Osen-Foss, J. (2016). *Graphic organizers to help kids with writing.* Reading Rockets. https://www.readingrockets.org/article/graphic-organizers-help-kids-writing

Sedita, J. (2005). Effective vocabulary instruction. *Insights on Learning Disabilities*, *2*(1), 33–45.

Sedita, J. (2020). The role of orthographic mapping in learning to read. *Literacy Lines: The Keys to Literacy Blog.* https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/the-role-of-orthographic-mapping-in-learning-to-read

Shams, L., & Seitz, A. R. (2008). Benefits of multisensory learning. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 12*(11), 411–417. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2008.07.006

Shanahan, T. (2018). How effective is independent reading in teaching reading? *Reading Rockets.* https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-literacy/how-effective-independent-reading-teaching-reading

University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). Big ideas in beginning reading. *Fluency: Concepts and research.* College of Education. Retrieved August 26, 2022, from http://reading.uoregon.edu/big_ideas/flu/flu_what.php

United States Department of Education. (2017). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. § 300.39 Special education. https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.39

ABOUT n2y

For 25 years, it's been n2y's mission to support special educators, transforming not only the classroom, but also the lives of teachers and administrators, therapists and paraprofessionals, families, and all the students we proudly serve. We believe everyone can learn and every student has the right to reach their full potential. n2y offers the first comprehensive program serving at the epicenter of the entire IEP team. Our differentiated solutions are designed specifically to help unique learners access the general education curriculum in any learning environment, from self-contained to resource, inclusion, therapeutic, home, or virtual settings. For more information, visit n2y.com and join us on Facebook and Twitter.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE...

Use Data to Travel Toward Student Achievement

Support students traveling toward success with ideas from industry experts! Watch our webinar to discover how to collect and use data to inform instruction, monitor progress, develop IEPs, and support compliance.

WATCH WEBINAR