STUDY GUIDE FOR

How to Plan Differentiated Reading Instruction

Resources for Grades K–3

SECOND EDITION

Sharon Walpole
Michael C. McKenna

A DIFFERENTIATION MODEL GROUNDED IN READING SCIENCE

In the years since this book was first published, many schools have embraced the science of reading intentionally. The funny thing is, this was always a book about the science of reading. The science is not new (although it evolves). *How to Plan Differentiated Reading Instruction, Second Edition* was recognized by the National Council on Teacher Quality as an exemplary resource in the science of reading (*www.nctq.org/review/readingTextbooks*). It has also withstood real-life tests; I regularly hear from teachers who are using it to learn about the science of reading, either in coursework or in book studies with colleagues. To honor that collaborative work, I have put together this study guide. Like the book itself, I hope the guide makes teachers' work a bit easier.

This book has a great story. Mike McKenna and I first discussed this issue in the 2007 book *Differentiated Reading Instruction*. We were doing extensive professional learning work, and we saw a very specific problem in the field. Teachers were collecting information on students' oral reading fluency and on their word recognition, but the curriculum materials they were using in the classroom differentiated only through guided reading. Guided reading, with students grouped by their instructional level and reading leveled texts, is a type of differentiation, but it never got at the heart of the

problem revealed in assessments. Students with decoding problems need decoding instruction. They don't need to practice reading predictable texts.

What we were trying to do was build a model for small-group differentiated instruction that honored research on word recognition and did not use any leveled texts. We had to make sure that it would be feasible. That means it had to fit into the cadence of schools, it had to be relatively easy to start, and it had to be informed by simple assessments. We improved on our 2007 model by scripting the initial lessons in the first edition of this book (in 2009); we then built a diagnostic assessment and, in 2011, scaled to upper elementary with our colleague Zoi Philippakos with *Differentiated Reading Instruction in Grades 4 and 5: Strategies and Resources*. We added colleague John Strong and improved on that content in a second edition published in 2020.

Before my longtime coauthor Mike McKenna passed away in 2016, we also had the building blocks of a full elementary curriculum based on the science of reading (and writing) fleshed out. The small-group model in *How to Plan Differentiated Instruction* is part of that curriculum and is nested within grade-level reading and writing instruction. The curriculum is called *Bookworms K–5 Reading and Writing*. It's open access; you can see it at *openupresources.org*. The science of reading evolves when we use empirical methods to document relationships between instruction and achievement. You can read an open-access case study published in 2019 that tracks the effects of *Bookworms* on all students, on those who are multilingual, and on students with disabilities here. You can also access a longitudinal analysis published in *Scientific Studies of Reading* in 2023 here.[1]

APPLYING THE SCIENCE OF READING IN SMALL-GROUP AND WHOLE-GROUP INSTRUCTION

You may be accessing this resource because you are curious about the science of reading. The science of reading is the broad and deep evidence that researchers have gathered about how reading develops and about how we can accelerate its progress. What our work continues to do, I think, is to link knowledge building with concrete classroom trials. You can use this book to learn important content, but you can also use it to change your small-group instruction, learning from that experience. Once you do that, you may become curious about your whole-group instruction. *Bookworms*

[1] The Bookworms case study report can be found at *www.cresp.udel.edu/publication/bookworms-case-study-report*. The Bookworms longitudinal analysis can be found at *www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10888438.2023.2284811?src=exp-la*.

will be waiting for you when you are ready! For now, I am going to provide a roadmap for using *How to Plan Differentiated Reading Instruction: Resources for Grades K–3* to access and integrate information about reading development and reading instruction from the science of reading. You can do the work on your own, of course, but a group of colleagues working together will make it better.

Chapter 1
Setting the Stage
(pp. 1–7)

Overview

Chapter 1 provides a teaser and reveals some of the commitments we make in the pages that follow. Students need to achieve a set of accomplishments that can be represented as stairs they climb (with teacher help). We share our commitment to implementation science and to the policy context as it informed our differentiation design. We tell our story, including the improvements we made to the work over time.

Comments

As I reread this section, I was drawn again to the recommendations from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide summarized in Figure 1.4. To embrace the science of reading, we have to embrace all four of these. Strong foundational skills include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling. They also include academic vocabulary and extensive engaged reading. The issue of dosage (or time allocations) continues to be among the most important issues in school. One of the goals of our differentiation approach is to leverage ideas from the science of reading to help students achieve strong foundational skills in the shortest possible time. Foundational skills are not the game—they are the ticket to the game. The game is real reading and writing.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Review the model basics section. Note any terms that are new to you and share them with your colleagues. Keep your list as you read—and take note when we improve your understanding.

- To what extent can you match the descriptions of what students on each stair step need to know with actual students you know and serve?
- We describe some federal policy in this chapter. Did you or any of your colleagues participate in these initiatives? How do they look in hindsight?
- Look at Figure 1.2. Where are you starting your journey?
- We refer to the IES Practice Guide. It's open access; you can download it here.[2]
- Its four major recommendations are listed in Figure 1.4. Discuss the extent to which current practice is aligned with these recommendations and where you could stand to make improvements.

Chapter 2

Models of Differentiation and Tiered Instruction

(pp. 8–18)

Overview

Chapter 2 helps readers compare and contrast models of differentiation. We begin by describing the concept of differentiation by instructional level, which actually predates guided reading. The issue of reliability of the informal reading inventories used to make this distinction makes the assignment of instructional level problematic, as does the lack of a clear path to a grade-level group. Differentiation by text level, a more fine-grained approach than instructional level, also suffers a conceptual flaw. Oral reading practice is simply not the best way to develop word recognition. Guided reading combines assignment of instructional level with differentiation by text level. Our approach, differentiation by assessed needs, is defined in Figure 2.2.

Next, we describe tiered instruction. Tiered instruction comes from the special education literature. It has been codified in many districts, sometimes in highly bureaucratic ways. We support the concept of tiered instruction as part of a response to intervention (RTI) initiative. Students deserve high-quality grade-level instruction. They also deserve targeted small-group instruction if teachers identify areas of need. If the combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction does not produce acceptable achievement, they deserve access to more intense instruction. Our differentiation model is actually a standard protocol RTI model.

[2] *ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf.*

In the section "Intervention or Differentiation?" we position our differentiation model in one of two ways: It can be a replacement to the differentiation provided by guided reading in a core program, or it can be a standalone instructional segment. Our goal is that all students in the class get some small-group instruction, including students achieving beyond their grade-level placement. To make that claim specific, we provide a roadmap of achievement over time in Figure 2.7.

Comments

Chapter 2 has caused quite a lot of discussion over time, and I have often been asked about it in the field. I stand by the ideas. In fact, the stance we took has been vindicated over and over again. Journalists including Emily Hanford have written about reliability issues in differentiation by instructional level and the lack of decoding content in guided reading. I also still believe that Tier 2 instruction (our differentiated instruction) should be provided for all students, including high-achieving students. The most important validation of that idea comes from the work of Carol Connor and her colleagues; they have documented achievement gains with students whose decoding is weak at the beginning of the year making the most progress when they have more teacher-directed decoding instruction and students who start the year with strong decoding making the most progress when they have less decoding instruction. The only way to accommodate both students in the same class is to have different ways to serve students during small-group instruction. Some can get additional decoding instruction and others can focus on fluency and comprehension.

Content in this chapter challenges some deeply held teacher beliefs. Differentiation is not about decreasing achievement differences between students. It is about decreasing the number of students who do not meet grade-level expectations. We can only achieve that if we know what each student needs to learn and have a reasonable way to teach each student. Teachers sometimes bristle at the content in Figure 2.7 if they see that a majority of their students are below grade level in foundational skills. This is a real problem, but it is one for which the science of reading is well suited.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Take some time with Figure 2.1. To what extent are you already differentiating process, product, materials, or environment? What evidence do you have that your efforts are helping students?

- Have you followed the press about problems with guided reading? Consider listening to the podcasts or reading the articles authored by Emily Hanford (*https://features.apmreports.org/reading*). You may find it interesting to know that ourbook was published before any of these, and we wrote about the very same issues!
- When you describe differentiation at your school, do you use the pronoun *I* or *we*? Why would the language be important?
- Discuss the potential costs and benefits of differentiation for all, rather than just for students whose achievement is below grade level.
- How do the students in your class or grade level stack up against the roadmap in Figure 2.7? For each cell, students would have to be proficient in that skill by the end of the marking period.

Chapter 3

Using Assessments to Guide Differentiation

(pp. 19–41)

Overview

In Chapter 3 we argue for an assessment *system* combining screenings, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring assessments, and outcome assessments. Then we apply these terms to the system that drives our differentiation model. All you need is a test of letter names and sounds, a high-frequency word inventory, the Informal Decoding Inventory (IDI), and a fluency screening. Everything except the fluency screening is actually provided in the text. Figure 3.3 shows exactly which assessments are essential for placement in a specific lesson set in our staircase.

We want to use the fewest minutes possible for assessment. For students in grades 2 and above, we start with an assessment of oral reading fluency with grade-level benchmarks. If students are fluent at grade level, they are best served in a Vocabulary and Comprehension group. If they are not fluent, we have to investigate their decoding ability. If they are not fluent but can decode through vowel teams, they are perfect for a Fluency and Comprehension group. If they have a weakness in decoding, the IDI results identify that specific weakness. For students in grade 1, we don't start with the fluency assessment; they just begin with the IDI. Kindergarten students begin with a test of letter sounds.

We present a rationale for our system beginning on p. 24. Unfortunately, the most important aspect of reading achievement (comprehension) is the most

difficult to assess reliably with classroom-based measures. That is why we use fluency as a gateway instead. We also describe the simple progress monitoring we use to see if our instruction was successful or needs to be repeated.

The assessments included at the end of this chapter are untimed. You can access them as easily printed PDFs by registering at the link on p. xi. These assessments have been used effectively by schools. Remember to read the directions carefully and not to change the decision rules. The IDI subtests are passed with at least eight real words and at least six pseudowords. We include pseudowords to control for the fact that students often have a specific set of words known by sight even if they don't control the corresponding decoding skills. The only way they can read pseudowords is by decoding, so those words serve as a check. Once a student does not pass a subtest, you can stop the assessment. You know just where to start instruction! The test of high-frequency word reading can be given *after* group assignment is made—and only to students in select groups. We address that in the next two chapters.

Comments

Getting the assessments right is essential to the use of this model. Oral reading fluency assessments (e.g., Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) got an undeserved bad wrap after Reading First. Oral reading fluency (i.e., automaticity) is easy to measure and has strong associations with comprehension during the elementary grades. If you have abandoned the practice, consider bringing it back. Over time, I have learned that stopping some assessments is just as important as adding new ones. If you have traditionally used an assessment that yields a guided reading level, you can't use that data and our data at the same time. They are measuring different things, and they will imply entirely different instructional groupings.

You will see that we don't use an assessment of phonemic awareness. That is not because it is impossible to assess reliably. It is because we can't differentiate for both decoding and phonemic awareness. You will see in Chapter 4 that we do use developmentally sensitive direct instruction in phonemic awareness, but we choose the target skills to match decoding skills.

Please do not use the IDI more than once a year. You will see that our strict criteria for placement (eight real words and six pseudowords) are loosened in progress monitoring assessment to about 60% correct. We want students to move through their basic phonics rapidly so they can apply it in extensive, supported reading of authentic texts.

I'll make one revision to the content in this chapter. I no longer think students in first grade should stop their Word Recognition and Fluency

instruction if they are fluent at a midyear benchmark. I think it's better to keep them in a decoding group in this pivotal year. I also think first graders should not go to a Vocabulary and Comprehension group, even if they are very strong readers. That extra group adds a level of complexity to the first-grade rotations that is hard to justify. Live and learn!

Discussion Topics and Questions

- To what extent does your school have an integrated assessment system? If you are lacking a type of assessment (or not using the assessments you have well), what could you do to improve the system?
- Do you have too many assessments? Which ones are not actually helping you to improve the quality of your instruction? Is it possible to stop giving them?
- Review Figure 3.6. It describes the staircase again in terms of assessed skills. Does the sequence match your understanding?
- If you use our assessment protocol, you can describe student achievement in terms of the on-track proficiency targets in Figure 2.7. To what extent are students gaining proficiency with foundational skills *on time*? If they are not, why not?
- If you have used a guided reading assessment, it may be helpful to compare and contrast the grouping decisions produced by that assessment with those produced by a fluency screening and the IDI. You will very likely see that students in the same guided reading group have very different decoding needs.

Chapter 4

Targeting Phonological Awareness and Word Recognition

(pp. 42–97)

Overview

Chapter 4 is where the real meat begins. We present a brief description of the seminal science of reading work related to the development of alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, and consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) decoding. The goal of the chapter is to provide the rationale for lesson design, the scope and sequence we developed and used, and the actual

lessons you can use to develop phonological awareness and word recognition (PAWR) in your own classroom. For students whose foundational skills are on track, these lessons are finished in kindergarten. For kindergarteners who demonstrate strong decoding, we move to a Dictated Sentences group.

On p. 46, we review the assessment-driving grouping decisions that apply to this group. Basic Alphabet Knowledge lessons are for students who need to learn letter sounds. Using Letter Sounds lessons are for students who know letter sounds but need to use them to read words. Using Letter Patterns lessons are for students who need to go from synthetic decoding to larger-unit decoding. For kindergarteners who demonstrate strong decoding, we move to a Dictated Sentences group; students in higher grades move from Using Letter Patterns to Blends and Digraphs.

PAWR lessons use direct instruction. Explicit goals, teacher modeling, and repetitive student response strategies allow us to pack the most trials into the fewest instructional minutes. Figure 4.4 lists the essential skills, in developmental order, targeted in each group.

Basic Alphabet Knowledge lessons review the entire alphabet to help emergent readers build strong memory representations. Then they engage children in initial phonemic segmentation. Teachers introduce a set of pictures to represent the days' target sounds. After the first 2 days of instruction, there are four target sounds each day. Teachers pronounce a word, and students have to segment the initial sound and match it to a picture with the same initial sound. This practice helps them begin to manipulate sounds in oral language—a phonemic skill essential for decoding and spelling. Next, teachers introduce and students practice identifying the target letter names and sounds. In 2 minutes, teachers should be able to do at least 40 gamelike trials. Then students fully analyze and practice identifying two high-frequency words. The session ends with a very brief concept of word activity. Students memorize a sentence and then "read" it by tracking the print.

Using Letter Sounds lessons capitalizes on students' letter sound knowledge and use it to read words. The missing link for those students is often the phonemic awareness skills of segmenting and blending at the full phoneme level. That is why we model and use Elkonin boxes to analyze the day's words before reading them with a synthetic phonics strategy. Students in this group will likely be able to learn high-frequency words more quickly than students in the Basic Alphabet Knowledge group because of their better developed understanding of the alphabetic principle.

Using Letter Patterns lessons helps students understand that synthetic (sound by sound) decoding is not necessary when words employ common phonics patterns. Direct instruction and phonological comparisons in this

group use onset and rime; student practice is more sophisticated as students spell rather than decode target words.

Dictated Sentences for kindergarteners who are proficient with Using Letter Patterns stretch all the important kindergarten muscles. These lessons are not about practicing spelling words the students already know. They are about applying segmentation and letter sounds skills to words that they don't know. Review the samples on p. 97 to see what we mean.

Comments

So many teachers have used these lessons to build foundational skills for kindergarten students or to intervene quickly for older students. To enhance the effects of the instruction, pacing and repetition are important. Unlike most aspects of instruction, these routines are meant to be followed exactly. They are derived from the science of reading, targeted to very specific skill attainment, and tested for feasibility to be implemented in 15 minutes or less. All items are supported and modeled through the entire lesson set, and students respond together rather than taking turns.

To test your understanding, use lesson simulation. Teach a lesson, following the generic lesson plan script, while colleagues participate as students. Then compare your lesson for its pacing and timing to my demonstrations on YouTube:

Basic Alphabet Knowledge	*https://youtu.be/Ukr2pxVxvLI?si=kx8DSGC1t4xn7Q3O*
Using Letter Sounds	*https://youtu.be/oreavHs5nDM?si=lUKlJfJnKunXFscJ* *https://youtu.be/GFBnHsXJYv8?si=-svBhLvYgp3gmk7m*
Using Letter Patterns	*https://youtu.be/j4V01NzzATA?si=yVxHQ-5riMSWb2MG* *https://youtu.be/GdKyzWOd0A4?si=HwTxLk1N05q8Jwsq*
Dictated Sentences	*https://youtu.be/dGMx1yT1XX8?si=_7HFLGlWbeIY-hH* *https://youtu.be/KAap_YMU2vE?si=f1wKsHcCi37EGlwF*

All lessons in PAWR link instruction and practice for specific phonemic awareness skills and specific phonics skills explicitly.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Compare the scope and sequence tables (Figures 4.5, 4.7, and 4.9) with other materials you use to develop initial decoding.
- Evaluate the extent to which the lessons are explicit (using direct instruction and clear skills targets) and systematic (using consistent and well-designed routines within and across lessons).
- Discuss the development of phonemic awareness across these lesson types. Basic Alphabet Knowledge develops initial sound segmentation and matching. Using Letter Sounds develops full phonemic segmentation and blending. Using Letter Patterns removes the support of the Elkonin boxes to build oral segmentation and blending, and then engages students in analysis of onsets and rimes.
- Discuss the development of decoding skills across these lesson types. Basic Alphabet Knowledge develops letter sound automaticity and Using Letter Sounds teaches decoding of CVC words. Using Letter Patterns moves from decoding to spelling.
- Students engage in individual decoding practice after sounding and blending in Using Letter Sounds and individual spelling practice in Using Letter Patterns. Why is this practice important?
- Carefully consider the routine for high-frequency words. Teachers are helping students to fully analyze the phonemic characteristics of each word and to match the phonemes to graphemes. We do this because all words in English use letters and letter patterns to represent sounds moving from left to right. Compare this procedure with your previous practice and see whether you can adopt this attention to the science of reading in all your work with words.
- Carefully examine the materials in Appendix 4.1 and match them to the Sample Script for Lesson 5 and to the Generic Lesson Plan for each lesson type. Make a list of what you would have to print for each lesson and decide how to store materials for reuse.

Chapter 5
Targeting Word Recognition and Fluency
(pp. 98–197)

Overview

Chapter 5 engages information from the science of reading and applies it to decoding words beyond CVC. The grouping requirements are straightforward; these children have passed the CVC subtest on the IDI but failed to demonstrate proficiency on a specific type of word. We match phonics instruction to the characteristics of the target words, and we also provide the opportunity for students to practice in decodable text passages.

We make the case here that the goal of any phonics instruction is the building of individual sight vocabulary. Proficient readers have a huge internal lexicon of words recognized immediately (by sight). These words include those that are regularly spelled and irregular, high frequency and rare. Words go from unknown to fully known by the process of decoding, mapping sounds and letters. In these lessons, students have sufficient letter sound knowledge and sufficient phonemic awareness to make that decoding rapid and to actually build their personal store of sight words *during the lesson*.

In order to make instruction differentiated, we ask that teachers group for instruction and then use the results of the Test of Fry Instant Words (Chapter 3) to select words unknown by any group member, in order of frequency. For Blends and Digraphs and *R*-Controlled Vowels, you need 40 words for 6 weeks; for VC*e*, you need 20 words for 3 weeks; for Vowel Teams, you need 40 words for 6 weeks. Once the first 200 words are known by all members of a group, this part of the lesson should be discontinued.

The lesson plan segments are the same across all Word Recognition and Fluency lessons: high-frequency words, phonics instruction, practice, and decodable text reading. What changes is the type of phonics instruction. For Blends and Digraphs and *R*-Controlled Vowels, we use synthetic phonics. We model that readers decode by looking at each letter or pair, saying the sound out loud, and then blending the sounds to make a word. We call the procedure Sound and Blend to make the strategy more transparent and explicit.

When we get to VC*e*, Sound and Blend won't work. Readers have to see the final *e* before knowing that the vowel will say its name (the long vowel sound). For this reason, we return to a two-part phonemic awareness and phonics routine. The anchor chart (p. 169) compares and contrasts short and long sounds for four of the five vowels. The phonemic task we give to students is the most complex yet. It is called *medial vowel isolation*. Teachers pronounce a word and then ask students to touch the picture of the word

with the same vowel sound. That phonemic comparison sets students up to learn that, when we see the final *e*, the vowel says its name.

Vowel Teams lessons capitalize on the insights gained from analysis of VC*e*. Vowels can work together to represent sounds. We use an anchor chart for these lessons as well (p. 180). The patterns that we ask students to read by analogy in these lessons are the most frequent spellings of these sounds.

Our decodable text reading does two things: It shows students that we work with words in isolation so we can engage in actual reading and it brings closure to the lesson. Each passage is read three times, in three different ways. First, students whisper-read asynchronously. Then, they reread in partners, alternating sentences. Finally, they read chorally with the teacher. The role of the teacher during this reading is to watch rather than coach; we want students to see that they can improve their reading accuracy and rate through practice.

Comments

Teachers often ask why we teach *r*-control before VC*e*. There are two reasons. First, we validated the order with 100 first graders when we were testing the IDI. Those students were more likely to score better on *r*-control than on VC*e*. Second, the type of decoding instruction we use—synthetic, sound-by-sound decoding—applies to *r*-control but not to VC*e*.

We didn't include *e* in our VC*e* lessons because there are very few single-syllable words spelled -*e*C*e*, and students can easily transfer their pattern understanding to read words like *here* and *these*. In addition, both of these words are taught as high-frequency words.

Many teachers have decodable text sets in their classrooms, and more decodable text reading can be a good use of student time. Consider using the passages provided during the lessons because they are designed to apply the new skill and review previously taught skills. Additional decodable reading can occur as independent practice.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- As you plan for students in this group, resist the temptation to make the groups very small. We tested these lessons initially in first grade with groups of eight with no issues.
- Review Figure 5.4 to ensure that you can segment high-frequency words accurately. Some are tricky! If the high-frequency word routine is challenging, practice it with colleagues.

- Examine the word lists in each lesson set in Appendix 5.1. You will see that they compare and contrast words with different features. Why would this be helpful to students?
- Examine the decodables within and across lesson sets. How are they designed systematically to be more complex?
- To test your understanding, use lesson simulation. Teach a lesson, following the generic lesson plan script, while colleagues participate as students. Then compare implementation to my demonstration on YouTube:

Blends and Digraphs	*https://youtu.be/SxeZlSHlXcg?si=banDJMR_-VF1cW9E* *https://youtu.be/hSnnbi9uxX8?si=XnWCyhdSjZvSTROM*
R-Controlled Vowels	*https://youtu.be/v54_4Lhp6TA?si=RXX6Lrn2dxPv6gHR*
VC*e*	*https://youtu.be/wyXqUOmq3XU?si=3qsNZ-f6HJm9_r4U*
Vowel Teams	*https://youtu.be/pQZbB6wPcQk?si=w_I_x6cHSwQsW6b7*

- Compare the instruction in Blends and Digraphs to the instruction in Using Letter Sounds from Chapter 4. How are they similar and different?
- Compare the instruction in VC*e* to the instruction in Using Letter Patterns in Chapter 4. How are they similar and different?

Chapter 6

Targeting Fluency and Comprehension

(pp. 198–239)

Overview

Chapter 6 brings us away from words and into real text. However, it is still fully nested in the science of reading. We have extensive evidence that repeated readings build both fluency and comprehension, so that is what we recommend for this group. Since students in this group are proficient at single-syllable decoding but not reading at grade-level rate, that is the target.

Teachers do have to select books for this group. We assume that students also have grade-level reading, so we plan for this extra dose to be slightly

less complex than their grade-level text. We provide Lexile ranges from the Common Core State Standards in Figure 6.8 to help guide text selection.

In grades 1 and 2, all students should have Fluency and Comprehension lessons without multisyllabic decoding. Only grade 3 students might need that extra boost for reading longer words. We provide a syllable-type primer for teachers in Figure 6.10.

Unlike typical practice, we plan our repeated reading to be uninterrupted. That commitment is necessary to build student reading stamina. As a bonus, it's easy to teach. After a quick review of where we are in the book, teachers read chorally and then students reread immediately (either whisper reading or reading orally with a partner). Teachers have to watch the clock to ensure that there is time for a very brief discussion. That means that some students will not have reread the entire day's segment, but that is perfectly fine.

We plan for a few inferential questions to be asked and answered orally. Students build their comprehension through after-reading discussion; they also benefit from hearing peer language. Inferential questions are easy to write if you start with *how* or *why*. Asking an inferential question also builds community because it communicates to students that you care what they think about what they read!

Comments

- This group can be even larger than eight! In fact, we use these very same procedures for whole-group instruction in *Bookworms*, so don't limit membership.
- Some teachers resist the call to select authentic texts slightly below grade-level Lexiles and revert to instructional-level placements in leveled texts. Resist that temptation. Students in Fluency and Comprehension groups have the support of choral reading. They don't need the additional support of simple text.
- I am less concerned with text length for this group now. Much more important is interest and challenge. Students are likely to remain in a Fluency and Comprehension group from fall to winter and from winter to spring, as these are the times when teachers typically administer fluency screenings. For that reason, books do not need to be readable in a 3-week segment.
- Many teachers want to use the multisyllabic decoding lessons before grade 3. We had two reasons for not starting until grade 3, and those reasons still hold. First, second grade should continue to be about widely engaged reading to build fluency and confidence in more and more challenging

texts. As they do that, we will add thousands of multisyllabic words to their personal sight-word lexicon. The vast majority of students will pass the multisyllabic subtest at the beginning of grade 3. Second, after the first 3 weeks, the words in the multisyllabic lessons are very unlikely to be seen in second-grade texts; they are simply too hard.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Review the sample lessons in Appendix 6.1. Planning need not be any more complex than that. A few interesting questions are all that is needed. Consider whether colleagues can commit to planning for one book each and sharing it with the team.
- Text selection for this group will always be constrained by the school's resources. Work with colleagues to share materials. Students need a personal copy or a shared copy to read with a partner.
- Practice with colleagues to match your reading rate during choral reading to the rates in Figure 6.1. You won't build grade-level fluency without modeling grade-level fluency.
- Use lesson simulation before you begin the multisyllabic decoding lessons. You need to be fluent enough in the procedures that you can accomplish a lesson in less than 3 minutes. Otherwise, there won't be time for a text-level fluency lesson.

Chapter 7

Targeting Vocabulary and Comprehension

(pp. 240–267)

Overview

The science of reading is broader than word recognition and fluency. Teaching comprehension strategies, text structures, and vocabulary are essential components. All students need such instruction, but we prioritize phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency first. A Vocabulary and Comprehension group is actually a heterogeneous group. Some students will be strategic and others more passive, and students will have differences in their vocabulary breadth. What they have in common, though, is that they have strong foundational skills and will benefit from stretching their wings. They will also benefit from hearing their peers talk about text.

Choosing texts for this group actually implicates an important new focus in the science of reading: the need for knowledge building. Text selection can build knowledge by extending concepts from grade-level reading instruction or by connecting to or previewing topics from science and social studies instruction.

Figure 7.7 presents a before–during–after format for these lessons. Remember that students will be reading silently, so they can read more quickly. Each lesson has to be customized to the day's text segment. Review the Sample Plans in Appendix 7.1 to see how we have envisioned the work.

Comments

- Don't underestimate the transition students make when they move from oral reading to silent reading. This is an important milestone, and one that should be nurtured.
- We do not recommend a Vocabulary and Comprehension group in grade 1. It will make the total number of groups unmanageable.
- As in Fluency and Comprehension groups, some teachers are tempted to differentiate Vocabulary and Comprehension groups further (high ones and low ones, for example). Resist this temptation. Your Vocabulary and Comprehension group should get bigger at midyear as students build fluency.
- Planning well for this group is more difficult than any other. If you are managing more than one type of group, focus attention on the others first. When you meet with Vocabulary and Comprehension, you can start by using the same format as Fluency and Comprehension but have the students read silently. Once the other groups become routine for you, add in vocabulary and text structure instruction.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Before choosing texts for this group, brainstorm topics that would add value to the rest of the grade-level curriculum. Vocabulary and Comprehension groups are not necessarily about reading harder texts. They are about learning new information while reading.
- A shared bookroom with lesson plans contributed by grade-level colleagues can make this work much easier.

Chapter 8

Making Differentiation Schoolwide

(pp. 268–273)

Overview

Chapter 8 is our final plea. We make the case that teachers deserve a strong grade-level curriculum, an uninterrupted instructional schedule, and materials for teaching all students. We also make the case for professional learning structures and support and informed administrators.

Comments

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the ideas we share in Chapter 8 more important than ever. If assessments reveal what students need to learn, and the science of reading provides routines to teach this, there is no excuse for us not to do it.

We built this book so classroom teachers could have the support to teach three different groups every day for 15 minutes. If your assessments reveal that there are more than three groups, consider teaming with a colleague. A large spread in achievement is typical if your school has not been attending to foundational skills, but it will become more manageable over time.

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Work with colleagues to answer the questions on p. 271. What do you see as your school's greatest strengths and highest priorities for improvement?
- What changes can you advocate to improve your differentiation system?