

Teaching Principles

Adopting the following instructional practices enables teachers to accommodate a wide variety of learning styles and student needs when teaching beginning reading instruction.

Explicit, Systematic Instruction

Explicit (direct) and systematic instruction refers to a planned and logical sequence of teaching reading, proceeding in small steps and checking for student understanding before moving to the next step. Teachers should follow a scope and sequence based on a logical order of reading skills, progressing from basic to more complex. Effective explicit instruction teaches prerequisite skills needed to learn new skills.

Gradual Release of Responsibility (I, We, You)

This model gradually releases responsibility to students for independently using a reading skill or strategy. At the first instructional stage (*I do it*), the teacher presents a reading skill to students and uses *modeling* and *think aloud* (see below). At the second stage (*We do it*), students practice the skill as a whole group or in small groups. The teacher guides this practice and provides corrective feedback to students. At the last stage (*You do it*), students practice the skill independently. Students require different amounts of practice and degrees of support in order to reach independent use.

Provide Models and Use Think Aloud

Teachers should demonstrate how to perform a reading task/skill, along with an explanation of what is being done, before expecting students to do it on their own. Modeling and thinking aloud lets students see and hear how to apply the skill or complete the task.

Use a Multisensory Approach

Multisensory teaching presents information to students in a way that uses multiple senses to learn reading skills (visual, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic). Teachers should use visuals, objects and manipulatives (blocks, counters, puppets), color-coding, saying/repeating, actions, and movement whenever possible.

Differentiate Instruction and Provide Scaffolds

Differentiated instruction entails designing instruction to suit individual student needs rather than using a standardized approach to instruction that assumes all students will learn to read the same way. Scaffolding is a hallmark of differentiated instruction. Scaffolding is assistance offered by a teacher to support learning a reading skill that a student is initially unable to grasp independently, and then removing the assistance once the skill is learned. There are several types of scaffolds: teacher scaffolding, content scaffolding, task scaffolding, material scaffolding.

Strive for Automaticity Through Practice and Review

When students learn a reading skill at an automatic (mastery) level, they have learned it so thoroughly that they can use it with little or no conscious attention. Decoding skills in particular must become fluent and automatic to enable students to focus on comprehension while reading. Significant guided practice, repetition, and spiraling back to review previous skills are critical to achieving automaticity.

Data-Driven Instruction

Teachers should use formal and informal reading assessment data to inform instructional decisions. It is important to progress monitor (on a frequent basis) which students are reaching benchmark goals for reading skills and which students are not. Teachers should use data to determine which skills need more explicit instruction and practice, how to group students for instruction, and which students may need supplemental intervention instruction beyond what is provided to all students.

Provide Opportunities for Success

When teachers challenge students beyond their ability or readiness to learn a new reading skill, the result can be low self-confidence and unwillingness to participate in learning. When teachers introduce a new skill, they should start with simple examples, gradually adding more challenging tasks. It also helps to include practice with some previously learned skills along with newer, more challenging tasks so that student can experience some success.