



Session 6:
Decoding

Teacher Professional Development Series



Recap

In our last session, we spent time...

- explaining the importance of systematic, explicit phonics instruction in developing skilled readers.



Today's Objective

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- ★ describe *decoding* - what it is, why it's important, and how you can support your students' abilities to decode with automaticity.



Decoding

Decoding is the ability to apply your knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce written words.

SOURCE: [Reading Rockets](#)



Decoding

Why is decoding important?

- It is a big part of the foundation on which all other reading instruction builds.
- If students cannot decode words, their reading will lack fluency, their vocabulary will be limited, and their reading comprehension will suffer.
- Teaching higher-level reading strategies to students stuck at the word level is ineffective.



How do you teach students to decode?

Align Decoding Instruction with the Stages of Reading Development

- Logographic Reading
- Novice or Early Alphabetic Reading
- Mature Alphabetic Stage
- Orthographic Stage: Syllables and Morphemes
 - students begin to read new words by analogy if this is modeled by the teacher.

SOURCE: Moats, 1998; Ehri, 1994



How do you teach students to decode?

Align Decoding Instruction with the Structure of the English Language

- Put the spelling system system in historical perspective.
- Teach speech to print, not print to speech.
- Teach word study beyond second grade.



How do you teach students to decode?

Teach the code the way children learn it most easily.

- Teach explicitly and systematically.
- Teach pattern recognition, not rule memorization.
- Encourage active, constructive exploration.
- Anticipate, prevent, and correct confusions.



How can you build your students' ability to decode with automaticity?

Provide opportunities for students to apply their learning in multiple ways:

- reading decodable words in isolation
- reading decodable words in simple sentences
- reading decodable words in connected text
 - decodable texts are not static - what is decodable at one point may not be decodable at another
 - decodability depends on students' knowledge of spelling patterns



How can you build students' ability to decode with automaticity?



Activities to support decoding:

- chaining
- Silly Voices
- Two Voices
- Readers' Theatre
- Word Sorts

Assessing Decoding

- When listening to a student read, can they accurately pair the sounds with the spellings and blend sounds together to read the words?
- Is their decoding laborious or automatic?
- If the decoding is laborious, the student may require additional support with phonological/phonemic awareness, or they may not have sufficient knowledge of the code.
- As students' ability to decode becomes more automatic (typically around mid-first grade), you can begin to compare their reading to established fluency norms.



Sight Recognition

- Sight recognition is the ultimate goal of decoding.
 - Fluent readers can automatically recognize a large number of words - this is known as their “sight vocabulary.”
 - Adult readers have between 30,000 and 60,000 words that they can recognize by sight.



Sight Recognition

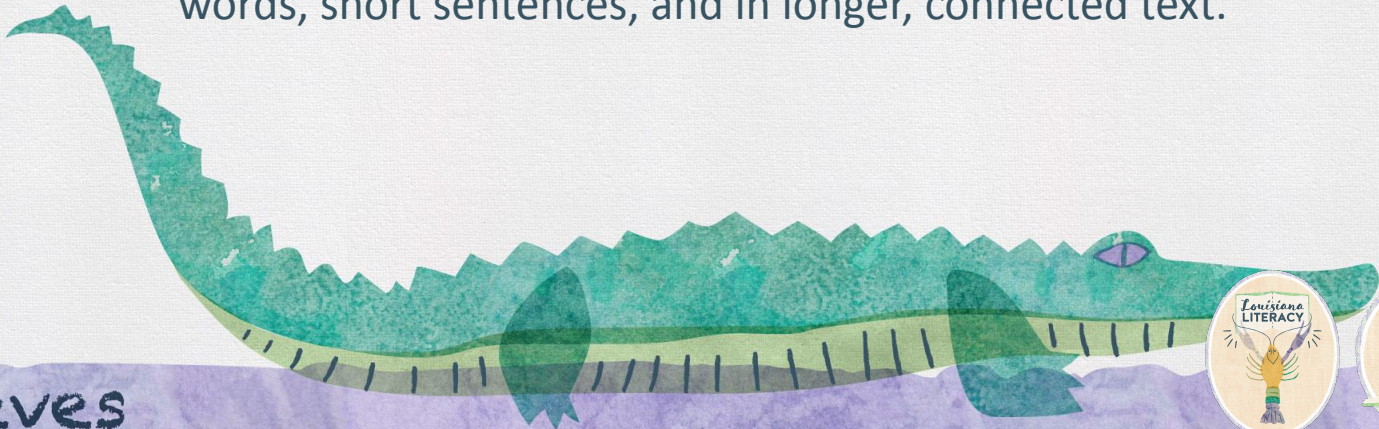
- Words learned through the letter-sound instruction lead to neural activity on the left side of the brain, which encompasses visual and language regions. In contrast, words learned via whole-word association showed activity more focused toward right hemisphere processing.
- Left hemisphere activity during early word recognition is strongly associated with skilled readers and is often missing in children and adults who struggle with reading.



SOURCE: [Yoncheva, Wise, and McCandliss \(2015\)](#)

Final Thoughts

- Decoding is an important step in the development of skilled reading.
- Knowledge of phonics is crucial for effective decoding.
- Students who struggle to decode will struggle to read fluently.
- Students must have ample opportunities to practice decoding - in isolated words, short sentences, and in longer, connected text.



Engage!

Sarah is a student in your class whose decoding is inaccurate and labored. It takes her a long time to read through any decodable passage, and much of what she reads is inaccurate. What would be your first steps in assisting Sarah?



References

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