



Divide and Conquer: Breaking Down Skills For Slowlearners

Curriculum Unit 80.04.04

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The slowlearner usually has a low selfimage. It is important to us to build up this image, and one of the ways is to have a good relationship among the students. We want them to get the feeling that, "I am as good as any one else in this class." There are several factors why the student is a slowlearner with a poor selfimage. One could be that he had poor previous teaching. This is unlikely, but we consider everything. If this is the problem then we feel we are on the right track by our method of teach, review, and drill. We know that good teaching greatly influences the making of a good reader.

Introduction

Causal factors for the reluctant readers are many. In order to change this attitude we must find the reason why each student will not read, or why he is turned off.

Whatever the reason, we must use it as a building point. We will at least know you cannot successfully use materials that the student is familiar with—material that he has already failed. It must not be below his maturity level (i.e., you cannot successfully work with a sixth grader who reads at a second grade level with secondgrade books).

There is a wide range of highinterest, lowvocabulary material that will appeal to this kind of student.

Problems

One of the greatest factors is inadequate instruction in the early years, and the continued use of material that has been covered, but not properly taught. We tend to stick to the same materials and methods.

This paper will deal with ways to change attitudes of the sixth grader who reads below grade level and shows little or no interest in changing. We shall look for ways to change these attitudes and behavior.

Another factor could be the social and emotional maturity, which makes the student a reluctant reader. In this case, he can read, but he will not. For this student, teaching the class as a whole, brings in social

intermingling, which in turn helps to keep emotions in check. Again, another factor is poor home environment, then teacher student togetherness, can go a long way towards correcting and developing better selfimage.

History

During the past year in our class, to help the slow learner build up a better vocabulary; in order to become better readers, we found new ideas and ways to implement into the curriculum that we hoped would make the students more proficient future readers. One of the new ways was the introduction of phonics which we taught in a unique way; phonics can be perceived by students through sound and symbols, writing and memorizing, reviewing and constant drills.

This is our premise: that there is a way to teach each educable pupil how to become a functional reader.

Motivation

First let's look at the teacher. He must believe in himself, knowing that he has the capabilities to perform the task (teaching reading to the reluctant reader). If he believes, he then will look for and try different methods, materials, and procedures. He will need a willingness to look beyond what is at hand, and he should be willing to pilot ideas and new materials. This enthusiasm can trick down to the class or student. There is a constant search for ways to teach the same skill in an interesting way until that skill has been mastered. The student must be made to feel at ease with the teacher. He must sense the sincerity and the genuine sincerity interest.

In our classroom we show not only enthusiasm but love to our students, and their achievements have been most rewarding. When the students start putting sounds and symbols together to make words, their spelling grades improve noticeably.

In September we found that students reading on 2' and 3' level, and shown growth to levels 3' and 4'. In The Craft Inservice Reading Program, Louis J. Cooper and Marion L. McGuire state "This transition from a nonreader to an efficient reader brings to mind a number of questions:

1. How does a nonreader learn to identify the thousands of printed word forms that make up the reading vocabulary of an efficient reader?
2. When a child encounters a word he has never before seen in print, how does he go about finding out what the word says?
3. Are all printed words merely memorized, or are there certain tools one can use for unlocking words that are strange in form?
4. What specific skills are needed if a child is to learn to work out strange words for himself?
5. Is there any logical sequence for teaching these skills?
6. What procedures are appropriate for teaching the wordattack skills?"

Let us stress that a teacher must recognize and answer these questions before she can do an efficient job.

Here are our answers to these questions. We teach non readers to identify printed word forms by phonics.

1. First, through the sounding approach, we teach them alphabetizing; that is, putting words in alphabetical order. Secondly, we teach the sounds they make. Then we teach the single consonants, and then we teach them how to sequence vowels with first letter consonants. Since we have taught the single consonants, we can sequence the short a with b, c, d, l, and p .

Example: ab, ac, ad, al, ap, at, etc.

With these combinations, the child should be able to work out such words as cab, lad, pal, tap, cat, etc.

2. When a child encounters a word he has never before seen in print, he visually divides the word into syllables, and pronounces each syllable as if it were a word. Then he puts the syllables together, and blends the sounds together as he says them, thus forming the word.

3. No, all words are not merely memorized. There are certain tools for unlocking strange words, such as using the closed onesyllable method. The student learns the rule for a closed syllable.

Rule: A syllable is closed if it has one vowel, followed by at least one consonant. The vowel sound is short: for example,

nin, deb, strok, phel, dock, flim.

This teaches the student to put the correct sound on the syllable.

Another way to unlock strange words is to learn the sound of the long vowel in words. First, he should learn that the long vowel has the same sound as its name, The long vowel has a long sound when the vowel comes at the end of a onesyllable word: for example,

be, he, me, go, no, my, try

Rule: A single vowel at the end of a onesyllable word is usually long.

The student will learn also that sometimes the long vowel comes in the middle of a word.

The silent e type method is another tool the student can use. The student learns when the letter e comes at the end of a onesyllable word it is usually silent.

Rule: In one syllable words in which there are two vowels, the first vowel is long, the e at the end of the word is silent: example,

ape, bake, cake, date, dope, slide

4. The child needs decoding skills to help him work out words for himself. One is lettersound associations. He puts the sound that letters make together to make syllables and the syllables together to make words. When the word appears in context, he uses the sense of the other words in the sentence and what he has already learned about letter sounds and syllables to decide what the word is. He can also use what he has learned about base words and affixes as a tool for a decoding skill. The strange word could very well be a base which he already knows, with a prefix or a suffix added on. The strange word could also be a familiar word the child already knows but is used in the context in an unfamiliar way. He recognizes the base word, and uses what he has learned about affixes to help him. The same applies to inflected endings on a base word. These are some of the tools a child can use to help decode strange words encountered in print.

5. Yes! There is a logical sequence. The approach we would use is to first introduce the vowels as a package team. Namely: the Sound Pack. (a, e, i, o, u, y, w) We will introduce the vowels and give the sounds. Teacher will put vowel on the board. Explain the diacritical markings. Then teacher will give symbols for sounds. Teacher will say sound. Students say name of letter.

Teacher will write on the board alphabet in manuscript (capitals and lower case). Students will

copy from the board alphabet in manuscript (capitals and lower case). Teacher and students will drill.

6. What procedures are appropriate for teaching the word attack skills?

First, we would teach the association of letter and sound pattern, because the student should be taught to associate specific letters in words with specific sounds. By the learn these sounds, they can deal with phonograms¹: Example,

ate, eb, ib, ob, ub

ac, ed, ic, od, ud

ad, eg, id, og, uff

These are all of the short vowel sounds. After learning the phonograms we introduce the vowel diagram:

ai, ay, all, aft, alk.

Then we go on into other aspects of phonics such as syllable types, consonant blends, diagraphs, prefixes, suffixes and inflected forms.

Methods

The method must vary. They cannot be the same for each student. Divide each lesson into two or three segments, no more than fifteen minutes each at the beginning. This time division can change when attitudes change. There should be an oral segment which allows for an exchange between pupil and teacher. Special care must be taken, for here we are building confidence and establishing a working relationship. There must be success built into each lesson. The student must meet with success if he is to continue.

The need for privacy in the beginning is of utmost importance. We begin with one on one, then move toward small groups. The total group activities in the beginning should be oral ones. You may chose to read to the group or listen to a tape that you can stop at key points for questions and answers.

Sometime we can talk about common interests. An example of this is the sports. Here you can find an interest and build from there.

We are constantly looking for sparks of interest.

We start with the alphabet, manuscript cursive writing and alphabetizing. Then we will tell the students that all letters that make up the alphabet have a meaning. We also tell the students that, among these letters some of them are called vowels, and some are called consonants, single blends and double blends. As we go along you will learn that each letter has its own sound.

Materials

The first rule for selecting material is that it must be new for the student with reading problems. The readalong books and tapes are interesting. The student can write his own story and tape it. There are special television programs that give preview questions. The student will know what he is to look for. These television programs are enjoyable as well as educational. "Little House" is one such program. Children enjoy Video taping. It gives them a chance to produce as well as to be a part of the production. There is an unlimited amount of lessons that can be taught from newspapers. After a visit to a newspaper publishing company, the students may be interested in putting together their own paper. It need not be elaborate. Most book companies have a wide variety of suitable materials. Commercial games are useful as well as the teacher prepared ones.

The students learned to put these sounds into longer words with consonant blends, e.g.,

blow, please, grow

consonant diagraphs,

phone, know, write

but only in the closed syllable, short vowel pattern,

camp, trash, swept

we then
advanced
them to
the long
vowel
sounds
and two

and
three
syllable
words.

As we took them through the sequence of combining the vowel consonant patterns, we made up drills for the students. The drills consist of a list of words in the unit that was being taught to the students. We varied the types of vowel consonant patterns. We made some of the words, consonant vowel consonant: example,

c v c — hat

consonant consonant vowel consonant

c c v c — that

or, consonant vowel consonant consonant

c v c c — fist

The teacher points to these features and has the student name them as the drill progresses.

Stop often and ask the student questions: example,

“What kind of a vowel consonant pattern is this?”

as she points to the word hat

The student will say, “It is a consonant vowel consonant pattern.” (c v c)²

The teacher will ask, “How do you know?”

The student will answer, “Because it has a consonant

followed by a vowel and it ends with a consonant.”

The teacher will reinforce the student by saying, “Yes, it does, John. Very good.”

You will find that the student thrives on being praised for a job well done. Do this until the student has mastered this concept. The purpose of teacher student response is to make sure the student begins by learning the correct sound. We used this technique throughout the teaching of all concepts, any new words and all activity sheets.

While working with the one syllable type word, use consonant substitution extensively. The students can see that changing the initial consonant, they get a new word, e.g.,

bib rob cub
dib nob rub
fib mob hub

We do the same for the two letter consonant symbol:

ch th ph
chap that phone

We also teach the three letter consonant symbol in this manner:

sch scr str thr
school screen straw three

These are all initial consonant symbols. After the student has learned to do these exercises independently, he is introduced to the end consonant symbols. We find these symbols in words like:

band cast bath thrash
bang clasp depth through
bend clump thing width

As students use consonant substitution, they strengthen the basic understanding that consonant sounds are not only phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) but morphemes (the smallest meaningful unit in the structure of words). Example: for ip , try

sipsip

tip ship

for at, try

hat that

sat chat

bat slat

As we teach the students about consonants, they learn that in a word s can stand for its own sound: Example:

s safe

whisper

insect

Words in which s has the z sound

z rose

was

as

The letter s sometimes has the sh sound, as in

sh sure

tissue

issue

They also learned that letters may even be silent in words, as in the words

price

trace

and that there are also silent consonants, as in the words below:

gnaw

knife

knot

We do not encourage competition among the students, and we also think competition among slow learners should not be encouraged by teachers. Most of the response should be by the group. This gives the class a feeling of togetherness.

We give drills again and again. The drills accomplish a dual purpose. They move the student from a slow response to a more rapid one.

To bring phonics into other subject areas, we did the following for reading. It can be used for any reading group, whether or not you are using the Basal Readers. This was done with the Wind Chimes and Passports Basal Readers. As the first experiment the teacher used the story, Two Weeks Old and on His Own, in the Passport's reader.

After having the group read orally, I gave them a previously prepared activity sheet. I listed the headings, Blends (all kinds), Short vowel sounds, Long vowel sounds, Affixes, Other. I asked the group to go to their seats and read silently, then do the activity sheet in this way: put the word under the appropriate heading and underline it. The students' answers were not in the same sequential order, but the answers were there. The teacher wrote all of the headings on the chalk board, and asked each student to read the words from his list. The teacher wrote the word under its heading. Under the heading "other," the students found some phonics concepts that the teacher missed. With this visual aid before them, the students could see the phonics concept in the word, sound it, and say it. If a student had trouble with one of the words in the list he had a second chance to learn the word. Do this often to help improve their reading.

For Language Arts label a work sheet, Listening Sounds. This is good for classroom discipline. Have the class sit quietly and listen to outside sounds. The work sheet could look like this:

Listening Sounds

(figure available in print form)

The chart above was used over and over for Language Arts. We also showed how the suffixes er and est can help the student compare things by

adding them to a verb, e.g.,

verb suffixer suffixest
fast faster fastest

Put each word in context to make sense for the student.

John runs fast.

Bob runs faster than John

Bill runs the fastest of the three.

In the spelling text, there are phonics concepts throughout the book. Set aside a spelling period to call the students' attention to the use of phonics to help increase spelling proficiency. Use sounds and structures. Give the list of spelling words for the week. Have the students use any of the previously learned phonics concept to

do a teachermade activity sheet. Choose from the list of blends, vowel sounds, consonant diagraphs, affixes, inflected forms or any others.

Using phonics in spelling has done wonders in our classroom. It has worked for us. There has been a noticeable increase in spelling grades. Here is a rough graphic chart to show the progress of four students; two average, two slow learners, and their progress during the school semester. I shall name them Ann, Cora, Ramie and Jess.

GRAPHIC CHART FOR SPELLING PROGRESS

(figure available in print form)

We can see that the progress of the two average students was more rapid than that of the two slowlearners, whose progress went up and down along the way. A good speller makes a better reader. This is a good reason why the phonics approach to spelling works wonders.

The phonics approach can also be applied to mathematics. Teach the students how to spell mathematical terms the phonics way. For example, the teacher can take the word Multiplication. The student is reminded to use what he has learned about letter sound associations and break the word into syllables. The student takes the first syllable Mul which he has learned is a closed syllable, whose vowel sound is short. The second syllable it has the short sound. The next syllable pli has the pl blend sound. The hard c sound and the long a sound equals ca as heard in the word cake. Then the tion syllable is pronounced shun. Then the student puts all of the syllables and sounds together, the word Multiplication is sounded and spelled.

Do the same for map skills. Have the student trace a river, a highway; find a lake, an ocean. Find mountains, plateaus. Name all of the phonics concepts in the Quinnipiac River and/or the Mississippi River.

Puppets are always fun. Make a puppet from an ice cream stick. Using plain white heavy paper, cut a circle six inches in diameter which allows room to print large enough for students in the back to see. Use whatever concept being taught or reviewed. Print the word or symbol on the circle and attach it to the top of the stick by glue or tape. Use a black marking pen to do the printing. Teach the recognition of syllables in words containing suffixes. Have each student make one so there will be enough. Give students activity sheets with sentences written, leaving a black space to put the correct word. We have 27 students in our classroom, so we make about thirty sentences. In this game each student anxiously awaits his turn. We made a list of thirty words containing a suffix. Write a word on the circles, so that each student has a word. Call the first student in row I to the front of the room to read sentence #1. The sentence can be: "The old woman was _____ when I helped her across the street." The correct word is thankful, and the puppet who has the word, stands and says the word. If a puppet with the wrong word stands, have the class discuss why the word is wrong. This can be adapted to the vowels, consonants blends and many other phonics skills. It can also be used in the primary grades. The circle could also be slit in two places to push the stick through; by doing this the stick can be used again.

Using compound words will help to introduce the student to two syllable words. Show him that each syllable contains a vowel, sometimes more than one. Always use simple compound words that your grade level student can understand. There are compound words that the slow learner has perhaps heard, but never seen. Examples:

mankind earthquake

township milkweed
hedgerow makeshift
boldface shipshape
broadcast quicksand

Play a game called "Out of the Hat," and use phonics. The teacher can make a hat or have the students make one. You could borrow a man's old hat and recover it. Use vowel sounds for this game.

Write all of the vowels on 3" x 6" white cards and line them up on the chaff board ledge. They will be a visual aid for the class.

Make about 50 white cards, 2" x 4". On these cards, first sequence the short a with all of the consonants learned previously. Example:

ab ae ah ak an ar
ac af ai al ap as
ad ag aj am ag at

Now write the long a sequenced with the consonants; adding the vowel e on the end. Example:

abe afe uke ane ase
ace age ale ape ate
ade aje ame are eve

This part of the game is used to help the student learn the sound long a makes when it is used with a consonant. Put all of the short a cards in the hat. Have each student come up and pick a card out of the hat, say the sound it makes, and return to his seat.

Remove these cards, and put in the long a cards. Proceed as before. To avoid confusion, we call the students up row by row.

After all of the students have had a chance, drop the cards back in the hat.

If you wish to do more with the cards, have the students pick a card from the hat, say the syllable and sound, and give a word that has the same syllable and/or sound. Example:

ad an ag et op og
bad ban bag bet mop dog

This is an idea we use to help improve spelling. It works wonders.

When you start teaching consonant diagraphs, try the following examples to help the student learn the sounds diagraphs make in a word. Here are some our students especially like. Example:

Ch+ab = Chab Ph+af = Phaf
Sh+ab = Shab Wh+ag = Whag

Try three letter blends:

Sch+ab = Schab

Spl+ac = Splac

As you go along you will think up many of your own ways to teach phonics in your classroom.

These simple games can be used with any subject by substitution, that is, using words that are associated with the subject you are teaching. We have found this to be especially good for slowlearners. It gives them the much needed booster of realizing, "I picked a word right out of the air, and spelled it correctly." It's a good proud feeling, and helps to improve their selfimage.

Syllable Clap

Clap out the beats of a word. For the word detective, for example, you would first say the word in syllables one time and then clap one, two, three, detective.

Say: "I am thinking of a word that has (clap the number) syllables." Let the child say a word that has the same number of syllables you clapped.

Look for objects around you. Ask your child to say the plural while you say the singular. Example:

Teacher	Student
Say tree	Says trees
Say chair	Says chairs
Say apple	Says apples

Consonant Pairs

Write as many words as you can that begin with consonant pairs using newspaper, or magazine: bl, pl, cl, sl, gr, pr, cr, tr, st, gl, sn, dr, and sk. Listen for them on radio and/or television.

Nonsense Game

Play a nonsense game with the class by naming a word that ends consonant. Then he makes nonsense words by changing the last consonant. Example: bat, bab, bac, bad, baf, bag, ban, baj, bak, bal, bam, and so on.

Alphabet Soup

Print letters on small cards (both consonants and vowels). Put three bowls in a row. Label the first "consonants," the second "vowels," and the third "consonants." Place the letters in the bowls and see how many threeletter words the student can make, using one letter from each bowl.

(figure available in print form)

Conclusion

Once we have begun the task of turning the student on to reading, we must not stop. We must utilize new materials and approaches. We can never go back to business as usual, for that is surely geared for failure. Search and research for new ideas must continue. As time progresses we can gradually get into a more formalized developmental reading program.

This will begin by testing to find the instructional level of each student and providing materials at this level.

There will be an ongoing process. Teach, test, and reteach if needed.

In Arthur W. Heilman's *Discovering Phonics We Use*, he states, "The process of reading is extremely complex. It is a total language process involving skills ranging from word recognition to critical thinking. Instruction and practice in all of these skills is essential to growth in the ability to read."²

In our classroom we are confronted daily by the total complexity of teaching the slow learner how to read. We are using all available ways and materials in our effort to teach the slow learner. Although we use a wide range of skills in our effort, we would like to that neither reading skills nor phonics are the totality of learning to read. We would like to quote Cooper and McGuire who says, "Wordattack skills are not the end for learning to read, but means to get to the end."

FOOTNOTES

1. The phonogram is a closed syllable which begins with a vowel (eg, eb, ac) and which produces a single speech sound.
2. When ever the symbol cvc appears in the writing, it means consonant vowel consonant. All other vowel consonant patterns are explained in context in which presented.
3. By permission Louis J. Cooper and Marion L. McGuire, *The Croft Inservice Reading Program* (Maryland: Croft Publication, Inc. 1970), p.1
4. By permission Arthur W. Heilman, *Discovering Phonics We Use*. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1977), p. ii Cooper and McGuire, *The Inservice Reading Program*, p. 3

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