

Texts for Reading Instruction

The texts used for reading instruction are a critical component in teaching children to read and to achieve high levels of reading proficiency. Research offers some guidelines for selecting texts for instructional purposes, but that research is limited. Children in the beginning stages of learning to read face major challenges in decoding the words of texts they read. Therefore, the texts used for beginning reading need to be carefully constructed and chosen to allow students to progress toward developing reading fluency. Beginning reading texts should include a high percentage of words that allow children to apply the phonic skills they are learning and help children become very familiar with high-frequency vocabulary. These texts are often referred to as decodable texts. However, the research syntheses are also clear that from the very beginning, children must view reading as a meaning-making process; therefore, even decodable texts must be as meaningful and engaging as possible.

Children at the beginning stages of learning to read have limited decoding skills and fluency; therefore, the richness of the ideas and vocabulary that they can deal with in the texts they are reading is necessarily limited. In order to further stimulate oral language development and build concepts and background knowledge, children should be introduced to more challenging stories and informational texts through listening to teacher read-aloud events. By the middle to end of first grade, the core texts for reading instruction can be chosen from the rich array of children's books that exist, with attention to their level of challenge, both in terms of decoding demands and comprehension challenges.

Well-developed, research-based instructional materials must include a balance of texts selected and sequenced to allow children to develop reading proficiency and a lifelong interest in reading. The following quotations support these conclusions:

- **1967 - Chall**

“There is no question that some form of vocabulary control is essential for beginning instructional materials. But must this control be based only on the commonest, most irregularly spelled words? Couldn't some of the control result from a consideration of the phonic elements previously taught?” (p. 261)

Beginning reading texts should include a high percentage of words that allow children to apply the phonic skills they are learning and help children become very familiar with high frequency vocabulary.

...texts must be as meaningful and engaging as possible.

- **1985 - Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson**

“No matter how children are introduced to words, very early in the program they should have experience with reading these words in texts.” (p. 43)

“The important point is that a high proportion of the words in the earliest selections children read should conform to the phonics they have already been taught.” (p. 47)

Guidelines for Beginning Reading Texts – “First, letter-sound relationships can be introduced in a sequence that would allow early use of as rich as possible a set of words while still exemplifying the alphabetic principle.

Second, selections can include some useful irregular words without confusing children.

Third, selections can include some regular words that embody letter-sound relationships that haven’t been introduced yet, but are needed to make interesting, meaningful stories.” (p. 47)

- **1985 - Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson**

“Each encounter with a reading selection should serve the dual goals of advancing children’s skill at word identification **and** helping them to understand that reading is a process not simply for word identification, but one of bringing ideas to mind.”

- **1990 - Adams**

“...we may demur that if only the basal stories and basal phonic instruction were consistently and carefully designed in support of one another, these conflicts might disappear.

Although I believe that such coordination would significantly improve the situation, it would not provide a total cure. There is a deeper problem: As material to be taught or learned, individual letter-sound correspondences and phonic generalizations are inherently intractable when divorced from the rest of the reading situation. They are abstract, piecewise, unorderable, unreliable, barely numerable, and sometimes mutually incompatible. Moreover, to be useful, any given individual letter-sound correspondence or phonic generalization must not merely be learned; it must be overlearned such that it is instantly

and effortlessly available to the reader. But overlearning requires lots of exercise and review and therefore lots of time.” (pp. 220-291)

- **1998 - Learning First Alliance**

“Reading materials (for first grade) should feature a high proportion of new words that children can ‘sound out’ using letter-sound relationships that they have been taught.” (p. 5)

“Reading pleasure is equally important as a reading skill and should be as interesting and meaningful as possible.” (p. 5)

“Even as children are further developing their decoding skills, they should be reading quality literature, including nonfiction.” (p. 5)

“...children need to be exposed to content in science, history, and geography from an early age to give them the context for understanding what they read.” (p. 11)

“Children need a great deal of experience with literature, as active listeners and active participants.” (p. 11)

“Early in first grade, a child’s reading materials should feature a high proportion of new words that use the letter-sound relationships they have been taught. While research does not specify the exact percentage of words, it makes no sense to teach decoding strategies and then have children read materials in which these strategies won’t work. While research does not specify the exact percentage of words children should be able to recognize and sound out, it is clear that most children will learn to read more effectively with books in which this percentage is high.” (p. 13)

“The National Academy of Sciences report recommends that students should read ‘well-written and engaging texts’ that include words that children can decipher to give them a chance to apply their emerging skills. It further recommends that children practice reading independently with texts slightly below their frustration level and receive assistance with slightly more difficult texts.” (p. 13)

“**Literature**– ...children should read quality literature appropriate to their current reading levels, ...

Expository Text- It makes sense both to infuse expository material into reading instruction..." (p. 16)

• **1998 - Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris**

"If the phonics information taught in lessons does not connect to the words in the books that children read, it is unlikely that children will integrate the new information into their word recognition strategies.

Reading books with elements and words that have been taught in phonics lessons is important at every stage of learning to read."
(Topic 3, p. 4)

"Reading from appropriately difficult texts is important, but it is essential that texts give children a chance to apply the high-frequency words and phonics of lessons during early reading instruction." (Topic 4, p. 3)

"Selecting appropriate texts... children benefit from exposure to many books rather than a handful of books which they memorize..."
(Topic 4, p. 3)