

The Reading and Writing Centre

your centre for expert advice and professional learning in
child and adolescent reading and writing disorders

Text selection

Systematic synthetic phonics

The evidence is clear that the explicit teaching of systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way of teaching children to read, particularly for those at risk of having problems with reading (Rose 2006). Synthetic phonics is the process of synthesising or blending the sounds and letters to decode words, and the segmenting of sounds and letters to encode words. Students are taught to decode (read) and encode (spell) at the phoneme level and attend to all the sounds and letters in a word.

Decodable texts

Decodable texts are an essential component of systematic synthetic phonics instruction. Decodable texts are specifically constructed texts that contain only those elements of the phonetic code that the student has already learned. They may also contain some high frequency words that are taught simultaneously (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is important that decodable texts are aligned to the instructional sequence of phonic code knowledge.

Authentic texts

Once a student has sufficient code knowledge and is decoding independently they can be reading authentic texts. Authentic texts include curriculum text and high quality literature and are an essential component for language growth, content knowledge and engagement in curriculum.

Beginning and struggling readers

Competent reading requires skills that extend beyond the single-word level to contextual reading, and this skill can best be acquired by practising reading texts in which the words are in a meaningful context (National Reading Panel, 2000). Decodable texts are important for beginning and struggling readers as they provide the opportunity to practise and apply the phonic knowledge and skills students have learned within a controlled text. They provide immediate practice of their new skills to build automaticity, fluency and confidence (Konza, 2014).

Predictable texts

Predictable texts align with a whole language approach that promotes three-cueing and guessing based on content and pictures rather than the application of decoding skills. The whole language approach diminishes the importance of phonic skills and knowledge and views decoding as a strategy of last resort. Use of predictable readers is not consistent with a systematic synthetic phonics approach and may mask reading difficulties.

