

CHAPTER 1

Beginning Reading Instruction and the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model

Over the past decade, there has been an unprecedented focus on the teaching of beginning reading. Teachers are passionate about early reading success because they know that it is the cornerstone upon which knowledge, self-esteem, and future educational opportunities are built. Literacy standards are on the rise, and those students who fail to reach high literacy levels are doomed to failure both educationally and economically. Research is clear about the need for early, effective reading instruction. Clay (1985) found that low-performing first-grade readers will likely be the lowest performing readers in the fourth grade. If teachers are to make high literacy levels a reality for all children, the instruction must begin when students enter the schoolhouse door. Although teachers know a great deal about the reading process, many questions remain concerning the most effective methods to use when instructing children. I have encountered many teachers who are frustrated by the lack of quality materials available for beginning reading instruction. Moreover, these teachers often comment that they were poorly prepared in their undergraduate training to meet the needs of beginning and struggling readers in their classrooms. The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model presented in this book will give each student a chance to receive the reading instruction he or she deserves. In addition to addressing student needs, the model also supports teachers by presenting an easy-to-implement instructional model that incorporates research-based strategies essential to early literacy success.

Children begin their formal literacy journey when they enter school, whether it is a preschool or kindergarten program. Beginning this journey requires teachers to assess each student's literacy knowledge and provide the appropriate instruction that will advance the child's literacy learning. Students enter a typical kindergarten class with very different levels of printed language knowledge, and instruction must be adapted for these differences. Implementing the components of balanced literacy instruction, including small-group reading, is an effective way to provide appropriate instruction. Some educators feel that teacher-directed reading is inappropriate for young children. On the contrary, young children deserve the same literacy opportunities as older children. Numerous young children are often left behind when they fail to acquire skills and knowledge critical to literacy development such as the ability to track print, alphabet knowledge, and phonemic awareness. Traditionally, instruction in these areas has taken place in a whole-class setting with little regard for individual student needs.

Beyond the Basal for Beginning Readers

Basal reading programs are the dominant means of reading instruction in the United States. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines *basal* as “bottom; part of a thing on which it rests; foundation; support; starting place” (1984, p. 92). This describes the appropriate role of a basal text: A basal reading series was never meant to provide a complete program, only a starting point. Basal readers are most effective when they are used flexibly and as part of a comprehensive, balanced program of instruction. Conversely, basal readers are least effective when they are used as the total reading program. This is true of all levels of readers but has particular implications for beginning readers.

The most overlooked component in current basal series is small-group reading in appropriately leveled texts. Although some basal programs give lip service to small-group instruction, the materials and guides necessary for successful implementation are often lacking. It is not advantageous for textbook companies to support an extensive small-group reading model that requires school districts to purchase numerous books because it would be cost prohibitive. Textbook companies are in a competitive market, and, therefore, they try to present the most economical program. However, without carefully leveled reading materials to supplement the basal, it is impossible to meet the needs of beginning and struggling readers.

Children in the early stages of literacy development have unique needs. If children are to seek hungrily for literacy, they must experience early success in beginning reading. Typically, the basal reader covers one story a week. Limiting a child to reading one story a week—a text that may or may not be at the appropriate instructional level—limits the child's ability to reach higher levels of achievement. According to Betts (1946), the “instructional level” of reading is the highest level at which a student can read with support from the teacher. Reading and rereading a variety of texts at appropriate levels drives instruction forward for all students.

Perhaps the group most neglected in a basal-only reading program is struggling readers. High achievers are capable of reading the weekly story before it is introduced; therefore, these students flourish in spite of the system. Average students probably fare best within the basal reading model, although they too are limited by reading opportunities. Struggling readers, on the other hand, are the clear losers in a basal-only classroom. More often than not, their only reading instruction is presented at a level of frustration—the level at which they cannot comfortably succeed. This then begins the downward spiral; motivation is lost and the gap between readers and nonreaders widens.

Gaps in the Guided Reading Model

Significant attention has been given to guided reading in recent years. The developers of guided reading, Fountas and Pinnell (1996), should be applauded for their contributions to this important reading process. It has, in fact, been the only reading model that has attempted to instruct children in a small group at an appropriate instructional reading level. The goal of the guided reading model is “to help children learn how to

use independent reading strategies successfully” (p. 2), which focuses primarily on comprehension strategies. It could, therefore, be interpreted that this type of guided reading is most appropriate for those students who already have mastered basic decoding skills such as concepts of print, letter sounds, sight words, or basic phonics and have reached somewhat independent reading levels. Although the ultimate goal of any reading program is to comprehend text, basic foundational decoding skills cannot be overlooked. Do we magically hand a book to a nonreader and say “read”? For many beginning and struggling readers it is not that simple. What happens to those readers who lack the prerequisite skills that are needed for reading? Many beginning readers require focused instruction that includes alphabet knowledge, phonics, or even the ability to track simple lines of print. It is our responsibility as teachers to determine the developmental needs of each student in the beginning reading process and offer instruction necessary to advance his or her literacy learning.

Although Fountas and Pinnell present some excellent comprehension strategies, there are some deficits in this model that cannot be ignored for beginning and struggling readers. The accompanying systematic word study, writing, and oral reading strategies are necessary to complete the literacy framework. Figure 1 shows the similarities and differences between guided reading and the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model presented in this book. Although it might be argued that word study and writing are taught during another part of the school day, the effectiveness of this instruction in the context of whole-class instruction with little regard for individual needs is questionable. Until a child becomes an independent reader, word study and writing

FIGURE 1
Comparing Guided Reading and the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model

Guided Reading	Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model
Students grouped according to reading level	Students grouped according to reading and word study level
Uses leveled books	Uses leveled books
Comprehension focus	Decoding and comprehension focus
Each child reads the whole text	Variety of reading strategies used (oral, silent, partner, and choral reading)
No systematic word study component	Systematic word study (beginning with alphabet knowledge and continuing through variant vowel patterns)
No writing component	Writing (beginning with shared writing and progressing to independent writing)
No word bank	Word bank (automatic recognition of basic sight words)

are so closely linked in the developmental reading process that they are most effectively taught in a systematic way that supports each child's reading level and builds a solid decoding as well as comprehension foundation. Although traditional guided reading has much to offer, we cannot ignore potential instructional gaps for beginning readers. As a parent, teacher, administrator, and reading specialist, I have observed that a more explicit small-group reading model is necessary for beginning and struggling readers.

The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model

Development of the Model

My interest in developing a specific small-group differentiated reading model resulted from my work as a reading specialist in a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. Along with other urban districts, our district was experiencing an ever-increasing number of students reading below grade level. In an attempt to reduce these reading failures, a search began for an early, intensive reading intervention model that could assist numerous students. The Reading Recovery model (Clay, 1993) was quickly ruled out because of the program's high cost and inability to serve more than a few students dictated by the program guidelines. However, Early Steps, a reading intervention model developed by Darrell Morris, met the criteria. Reading tutors, assistants, and volunteers could be trained in this early intervention model, and numerous at-risk students could be served.

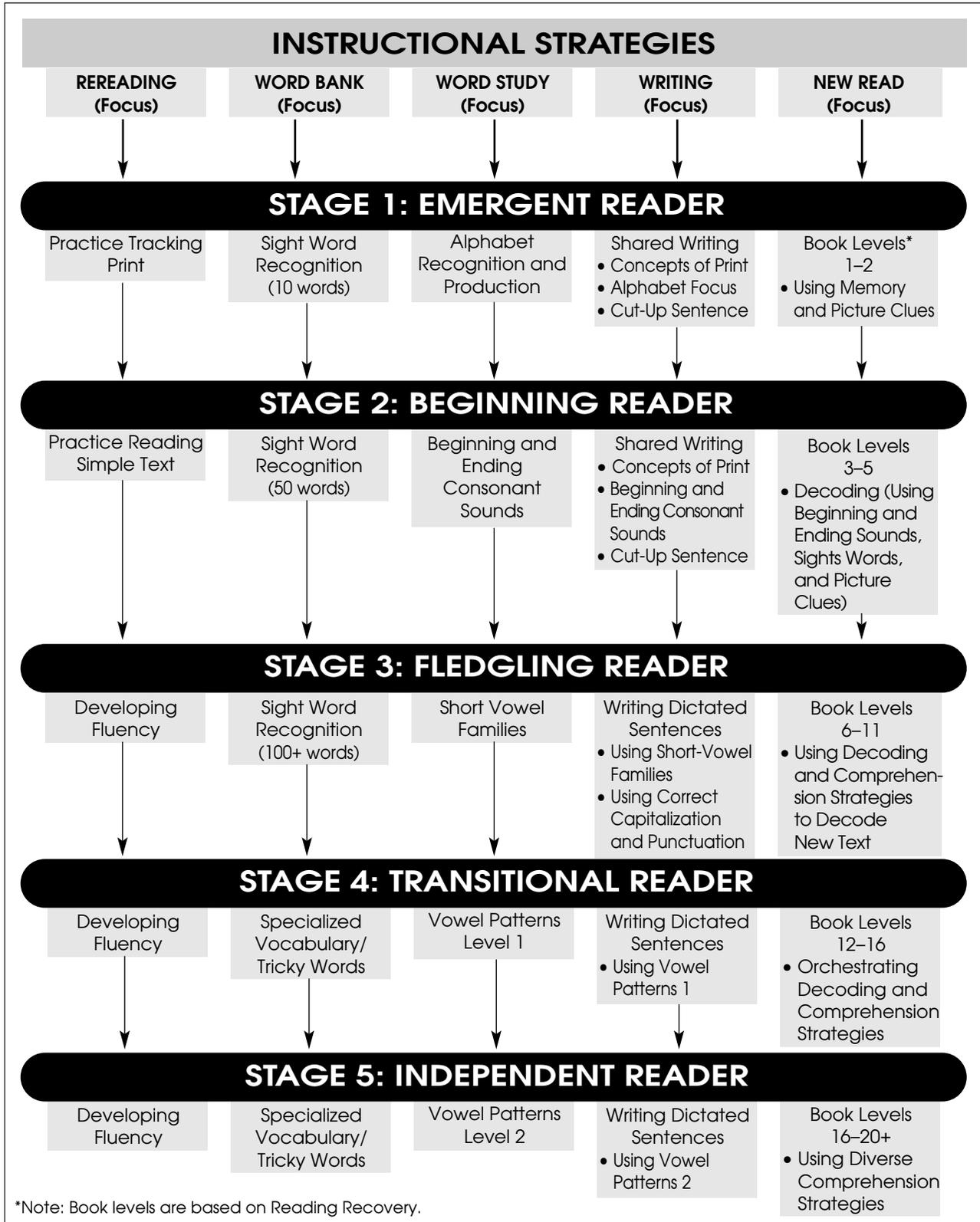
Early Steps, a one-on-one tutoring intervention, is based on research and best practices in reading instruction, including rereading, word study, and writing as integral parts. Most important, reading tutors are trained on site in an apprenticeship format. First-grade students in our district made impressive gains as a result of the implementation of Early Steps (see Morris et al., 2000). Although the intervention was successful for individual students, the basal reading program continued to be ineffective in meeting the needs of students in the classroom. Whole-class instruction and a lack of appropriately leveled books left teachers frustrated.

Using the components of Early Steps, I set out to develop a small-group differentiated instructional model that would address the needs of beginning and struggling readers in the regular classroom setting. The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model (see Figure 2) provides a systematic framework for teaching beginning and struggling readers. It takes into consideration the developmental stages through which readers progress, the critical strategies for reading success, and the time needed to develop these literacy foundations.

What Is Differentiated Reading Instruction?

As many schools move toward adapting to an ever-increasing broad range of learners, it becomes more important than ever to develop instruction to respond to these academically diverse students. Research has documented the tendency of educators to

FIGURE 2
The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model



“teach to the middle,” or to “teach to a standard” (see, for example, Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993). This one-size-fits-all curriculum has failed to meet the needs of many slower and accelerated students. Differentiating instruction for beginning readers is one step to appropriately address the academic diversity that exists in virtually every primary classroom. Quite simply, differentiation means modifying instruction based on student readiness. A research study in Texas revealed that there was typically a four-year grade span between the lowest and highest readers in first-grade classrooms (Guszak, as cited in Texas Reading Initiative: Differentiated Instruction). Differentiating reading instruction enables teachers to plan strategically so that they can meet the needs of both weaker and stronger students.

At its core, the model of differentiated reading presented in this book uses research-based strategies in beginning reading instruction and developmental models that recognize the stages through which beginning readers must progress. Readers and nonreaders have been typically categorized as either one group or the other with little regard for the in-between group in which many beginning and struggling readers are often trapped. Reading is not an all-or-nothing skill: Alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics, print-related knowledge, word recognition, spelling, and writing are all integral parts. This is the basis for the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model. The question then becomes, Where along the reading continuum does each reader fall? Whenever a teacher reaches out to a small reading group to vary teaching techniques and strategies to create the best teaching experience possible, differentiated instruction takes place.

Children enter the classroom with a variety of background experiences. For children with lots of prior experiences with print, many of the early reading processes may already be mastered. In contrast, children who enter with relatively no knowledge about print will require a different instructional plan. Without differentiated reading instruction, some children will fall further behind whereas others will be left unchallenged. In reading instruction, the gap between poor and good readers widens with each subsequent year (Clay, 1985). The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model includes a variety of reading strategies based on the developmental needs of the reader, not on the chronological age or grade level. Although student differences might be inconvenient at times to accommodate, they must be recognized and addressed. Adapting to student diversity is the price educators must pay if we are sincere about having students achieve higher standards and having the best interest of each student at heart. Students start at different points in the reading process, and we must provide the most appropriate level of challenge to increase their literacy learning.

The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model presented in Figure 2 is differentiated in two important ways. First, the five stages in the beginning reading process—emergent reader, beginning reader, fledgling reader, transitional reader, and independent reader—are clearly differentiated as a reader progresses toward independence. Additionally, the instructional strategies—rereading, word bank, word study, writing, and new read—are differentiated: They support both code-emphasis (phonics) and meaning-emphasis (whole language) strategies. Although there remains some

contention concerning these two predominant methods of reading instruction, it is time to recognize the common ground that research clearly supports: a need for both strategies to be taught.

Differentiating the Stages of Beginning Reading

Reading is a complex process with many steps and variables. However, the road to reading has some definite milestones through which readers must navigate. According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, the definition of *differentiation* is “the development of the simple to the complex” (1984, p. 205). Additionally, *Webster's* defines the word as “a difference between individuals of the same kind.” Beginning readers are often lumped together with little delineation of differences, yet these differences are critical to the reading process and should not be ignored.

To differentiate also means “to vary according to circumstance” (*Oxford Illustrated American Dictionary*, 1998, p. 227). In most primary classrooms, some students struggle with reading, others perform well beyond grade-level expectations, and the rest fall somewhere in between. By differentiating the stages of reading instruction through flexible small groups, the diverse needs of a heterogeneous group can best be met. This differentiated reading model recognizes the developmental stages through which a reader progresses and adapts instructional strategies to support the reader in each stage. Allowing for flexible small-group reading instruction in primary classrooms where some students struggle and others perform well beyond grade-level expectations provides appropriate instruction for all readers.

To effectively guide the reading process, first there must be an understanding of the stages in beginning reading and the print demands placed on a reader at these different stages. For example, in the early stages of reading, there is a heavier emphasis on decoding than on comprehension. Contextual reading, writing, spelling, sight-word recognition, and phonics develop simultaneously in predictable stages. Figure 3 details the five stages that are addressed in the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model. Appropriate grade-level designations are given for each of the reading stages along with the beginning student characteristics and major focuses of each stage. This progression begins in Stage 1 with the emergent reader (basically nonreader) and continues to an independent reading level in Stage 5. Students advance through these levels as they build on their knowledge and move forward at their own pace. These five stages serve as the basis for the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model presented in this book and will be discussed thoroughly in chapters 4 through 8.

Differentiating Instructional Strategies

Over the past decades, many educators and parents have become frustrated with or confused about the wide swings in the reading instruction pendulum. A team of U.S. national education associations recently observed,

FIGURE 3
Stages of Beginning Reading

Stage	Appropriate Grade Level	Beginning Student Characteristics	Major Focuses
1 Emergent Reader	Pre-K/K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows less than half the alphabet • Has no concept of word • Has little phonemic awareness • Recognizes a few sight words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using memory and pictures • Recognizing and reproducing letters of the alphabet • Tracking print • Distinguishing beginning consonant sounds • Recognizing 10 sight words
2 Beginning Reader	Late K/ Early First Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows three quarters or more of the alphabet • Is beginning to track print • Is able to hear some sounds • Recognizes 10 sight words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing alphabet recognition and production • Using beginning and ending consonant sounds • Recognizing 50 sight words • Reading simple text • Using sentence context and pictures or word recognition cues to decode
3 Fledgling Reader	Early/Mid First Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirms with beginning and ending consonant sounds • Recognizes 50+ sight words • Reads simple text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing and using word families in reading and writing • Recognizing 100+ sight words • Reading more complex text • Developing fluency • Developing comprehension strategies • Self-correcting errors
4 Transitional Reader	Mid/Late First Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes word families in isolation and in texts • Recognizes 100+ sight words • Reads developed text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using word patterns in reading and writing • Developing independent reading using decoding and comprehension strategies • Developing fluency
5 Independent Reader	Early/Late Second Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads and writes independently • Uses strategies to figure out new words • Reads fluently • Uses word patterns in reading and writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing diverse comprehension strategies • Using complex word patterns • Developing fluency in a variety of texts • Responding to text in a variety of ways

The famous pendulum of educational innovation swings more widely on reading than in any other subject. Pendulum swings of this kind are characteristic of fields driven by fashion, not evidence. Hemlines go up and down because of changing tastes, not new evidence; progress in medicine, engineering, and agriculture, based to a far degree on evidence from rigorous research, is both faster and less subject to radical shifts. In the same way, educational practice must come to be based on evidence—not ideology. (Learning First Alliance, 1998, p. 18)

Typically, when a particular strategy or approach in reading fails to teach some children how to read, educators respond by changing instructional approaches. Unfortunately, the new approach may prove to be effective with only a portion of students, and educators scurry back to the first approach.

Few educators would argue that good reading instruction includes a combination of strategies to teach all children to read. A differentiated approach that includes the best research practices will more likely meet a much wider range of learners (Clay, 1979; Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986). The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model attempts to capture the best practices in reading instruction for beginning readers through the integration of carefully differentiated instructional strategies in each lesson. Rather than relying on one approach or another, each strategy has been carefully weighed in relation to research and its importance to the reading process. Although chapter 3 will address the specific research that supports these lesson strategies, it is important to discuss the developmental process on which each strategy builds.

Rereading

Reading and rereading books are consistent strategies in each stage of the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model. Beginning readers can become disillusioned with the reading process if they do not actually have a book in their hands and are therefore given books to read in the first stage. Stage 1 begins with books using repetitive text and pictures to tell the story, also known as high picture support. The focus of these strategies in Stage 1 is to have extended practice in tracking print and using picture clues. Stage 2 builds on this process by advancing to text that is less repetitive and has more words on a page. By this time, students are also practicing their decoding skills, which include the knowledge of using beginning and ending sounds and recognizing some sight words. In Stage 3, the emphasis on decoding gradually merges with a stronger focus on comprehension in more complex texts. The need for rereading in each subsequent stage now focuses on the development of fluency. Stage 4 encourages readers to orchestrate decoding and comprehension strategies as students read from a variety of genres. Stage 5 marks a milestone in the reading process in which students have developed the decoding skills and contextual knowledge necessary to become independent readers. The lesson plan in Stage 5 refocuses to encourage longer text selections, the development and the introduction of more complex questioning, and the incorporation of diverse comprehension strategies. The Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model begins with level 1 (Reading Recovery) books in Stage 1 and progresses to level 20 (considered to be a solid second-grade reading level) books in Stage 5.

Word Bank

Whereas sight words are most often taught in the classroom using word walls, this customized word bank is used as a vehicle to increase automaticity in sight word recognition in Stages 1, 2, and 3 of the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model. Word bank in Stage 1 begins by building a bank of sight words that most members of the reading group recognize automatically. These words are identified in the books being read and reread in the small group to establish a connection between the word bank and the words seen in text. This word bank grows gradually and is reviewed in each lesson to enhance automaticity in word recognition. Approximately 10 words should be mastered during Stage 1. Stage 2 simply continues the process as the teacher works to identify new words to add to the bank. The goal in Stage 2 is to recognize at least 50 sight words. In Stage 3, additional words may be selected from the word study to include in word bank. When the group reaches a goal of recognizing at least 100 sight words, the focus changes.

In Stages 4 and 5, word bank is used for vocabulary development as students begin to read across a variety of genres. Word bank also may be used at this point to house difficult words that are missed routinely in the group. The word bank is differentiated to meet the needs of students as they progress through the stages of beginning reading.

Word Study

As previously noted, word study is traditionally taught in a whole-group setting with little regard for a student's individual readiness level. The word study taught in whole group may or may not be meaningful for individual young readers, depending on their stage of reading development. It is difficult for a student to bring meaning to a lesson on long vowel patterns if he or she lacks the basic knowledge of short vowel sounds or even beginning and ending consonant sounds. Systematic word study provides a safety net for students who fail to glean this knowledge in whole-class lessons and provides confidence for the teacher, who knows that major gaps in word study are not neglected. Just as students are grouped for guided reading based on similar reading processes, basic word study skills also must be considered.

Beginning in Stage 1 with alphabet recognition and production, students advance through systematic phonics instruction that is appropriate to the group's reading level. Stage 2 readers develop phonological awareness of beginning and ending sounds. Beginning in Stage 3, word study advances to a systematic study of short-vowel word families. As part of word study, spelling also is incorporated as a differentiated activity based on the group's current word study focus. Stages 4 and 5 focus on the automatic recognition of common vowel patterns, which completes the word study sequence. Careful pacing through the word study progression is essential. Unlike whole-class phonics instruction, students are encouraged to master basic phonics skills before progressing to the next stage. Differentiation in word study provides a strong backdrop for establishing important decoding skills.

Writing

A developmental writing component in each lesson brings together the target word study strategies in the context of a writing experience. This component allows students to practice known strategies as they relate to writing in a teacher-supported environment. The writing process in the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model begins in Stage 1 with a shared writing activity. In this shared writing experience, the teacher acts as a scribe while the students contribute to writing a sentence. In an attempt to align the writing experience with the group word study focus, alphabet recognition is emphasized. Standard conventions of print such as capital letters, punctuation, and spacing between words also are demonstrated. After the sentence is completed, the words in the sentence are cut apart and the students are asked to reassemble the sentence. This activity helps students understand the concept of word and sentence construction. In Stage 2, the shared sentence model continues with a shift in focus to attending to beginning and ending consonant sounds that reflect the group's current word study focus. The teacher also uses some familiar words from the group's word bank as part of the sentence structure. This allows the students to see these words as a part of meaningful text. Stage 3 refocuses the writing activity to allow students to write independently as the teacher dictates the sentence. At this point, students are expected to write a complete sentence using correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Stages 4 and 5 require students to write dictated sentences that use variant vowel patterns that are the current focus of word study. This writing activity is usually quick, as students have mastered the required skills to write these simple sentences correctly. Differentiating this writing strategy supports students in their developing reading and writing independence.

New Read

The new read allows students to read a new book daily as they apply known strategies to new text challenges. Extended practice in reading instructionally appropriate books enhances literacy development. In Stage 1, the emergent readers echo read, or read after the teacher has first read the text as the teacher calls attention to the pictures that support the reading. Students develop concept of word in this process and learn to use picture clues as a decoding strategy. In each stage, the teacher also may use the new read as an opportunity to find words for the group word bank. Less echo reading is used in Stage 2 as students focus on beginning sounds and word bank words as decoding strategies. The picture walk introduces the book as the teacher and the students look at the book together and talk about the story based on the pictures. The picture walk is instrumental to reading success for these beginning readers. Stage 3 encourages students to read the new book with strategic support by the teacher. Word bank words (high-frequency words) and word family knowledge support the reading of the new text. The new read in Stages 4 and 5 allows students to orchestrate decoding and comprehension strategies as they move toward reading independence.

What Makes the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model Successful?

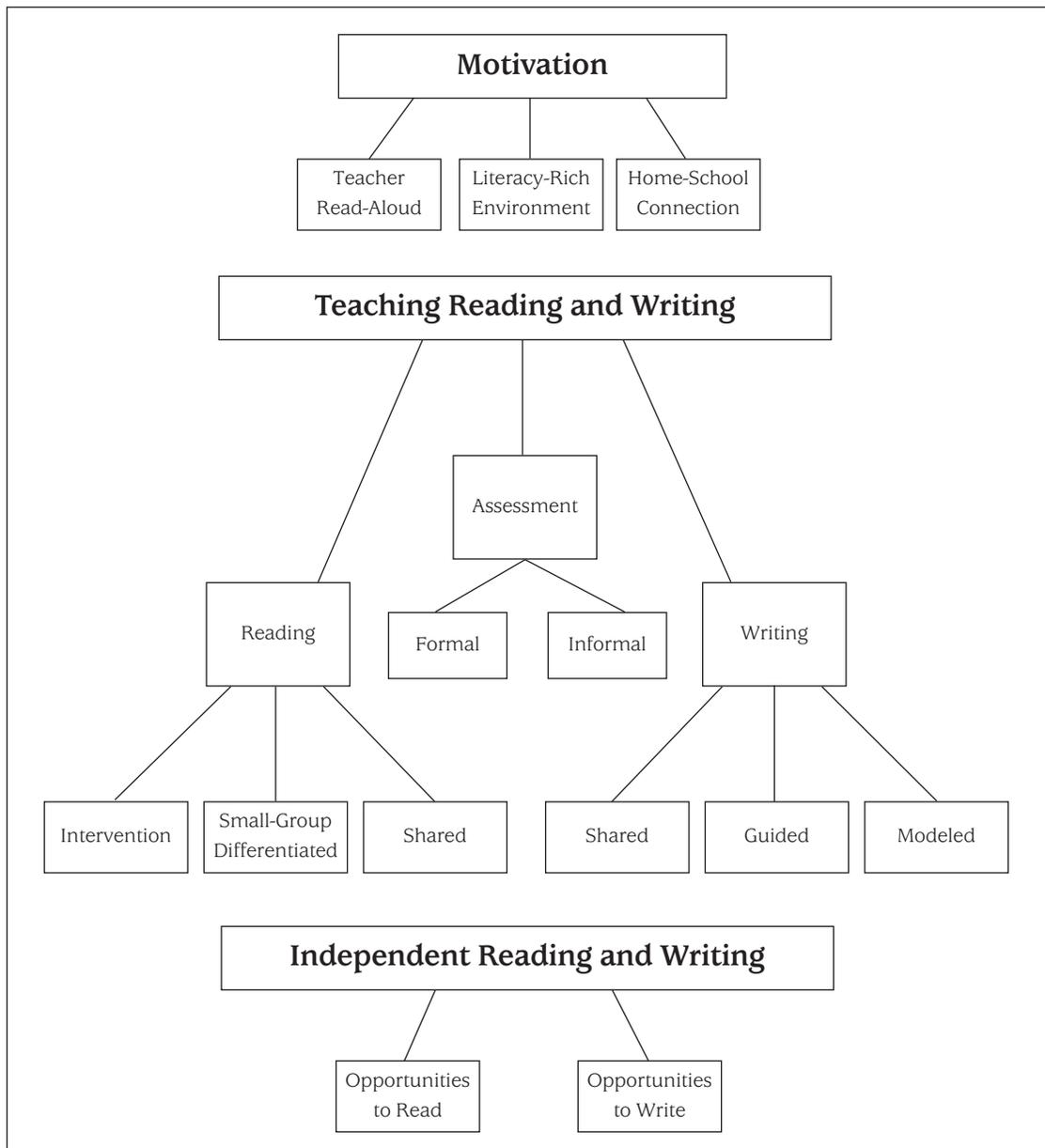
Models are representations that combine common parts into a whole. Models also suggest how the valued parts of a system might work together. Developing a model inclusive of differentiated reading stages and research-based strategies helps us to understand the reading process as a whole. Anchored in research, the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model brings together many complex reading strategies. However, it is because the model has been systematically developed that the instructional components carry special weight. There are several aspects of this differentiated reading model that support its success.

- Small-group differentiated instruction provides systematic and comprehensive coverage of the strategies required to move students to greater achievement in reading.
- The teacher ensures that the reading activities are “respectful.” Every group of students is given quality reading instruction and tasks that are worthwhile, valuable, and matched to students’ instructional level.
- Assessment is ongoing and directly linked to instruction. Teachers gather information from both formal and informal assessments about how their students are progressing in their learning at any given point. Whatever the teacher can glean about student reading readiness helps the teacher plan the next steps in reading instruction.
- Students are constantly evaluated and shuffled and reshuffled in flexible groups to best meet instructional needs.
- Small-group differentiated reading provides intensive and continually adjusted instruction in reading, word study, and writing.
- Differentiated reading takes into consideration the individual characteristics of the children, capitalizes on the strengths they have, and expands and challenges their abilities.
- The individual components of the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model work interactively, building on and supporting one another. Each lesson introduces a new book. The rereading of this book builds sight vocabulary, promotes strategy use, and increases fluency. Additionally, new words for the word bank are selected from the reread selections. The sentence writing includes words taken from the word bank as well as from the word study. Therefore, this model allows for the interactive development of reading, word study, and writing.

Small-Group Differentiated Reading in Balanced Literacy Instruction

Although this book focuses on small-group differentiated reading instruction and its importance, the additional components of a balanced literacy program cannot be overlooked (see Figure 4). Small-group differentiated reading is a critical part of balanced literacy instruction, which, when implemented effectively, gives every student the opportunity to become a successful reader.

FIGURE 4
Balanced Literacy Instruction for Beginning and Struggling Readers



Motivation

Motivation is essential if children are to become successful readers, and it is perhaps the easiest component to implement in the early elementary grades. Children come to school expecting to learn to read. It is only when the system fails to make this a reality that motivation becomes an issue. Reading to children is the ultimate motivator. Reading aloud allows children to connect to the text and experience the excitement and pleasure in reading. My first motivation to become a reader occurred when my fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Bolick, read part of a book to our class and, at the peak of excitement, told us that the book was in the library if we wanted to read it. Ms. Bolick knew how to select the right book to motivate fourth graders. Additionally, teacher read-aloud is a powerful tool for teaching comprehension strategies to children who are beginning the reading process. Pre- and postreading discussions and questions promote student interaction with the text. It is difficult to imagine a motivating environment without books and additional print. Students get excited about reading when they are surrounded by a variety of books to explore, read, and enjoy. It is, therefore, the teacher's responsibility to provide a literacy-rich environment. This affords children many opportunities to listen to and read printed language.

The importance of family support cannot be underestimated in motivating readers. Encouraging literacy in the home supports the total reading process. One powerful way to build the home-school connection is to implement a take-home book program in which students and parents build strong literacy bonds as they read together. Although family support is a plus, the lack of family support cannot be used as an excuse for children who are unable to read. Teachers have more than enough class time with students to motivate and teach them to read.

Teaching Reading and Writing

The centerpiece of a balanced literacy program lies in the teaching of reading and writing. This is what I refer to as direct, face-to-face teaching. Some whole language advocates once thought that if you immersed children in reading and writing, they would somehow learn these skills on their own. Educators now realize that this is not true for many students. The *teaching* of reading and writing is essential to increasing student achievement. As teachers, we probably do a better job with shared reading than with any other component in balanced literacy instruction. The use of Big Books has been instrumental in promoting whole-group shared reading over the past two decades. The challenge appears to be in equipping teachers with the skills necessary to become effective in small-group reading situations. My motivation in writing this book is my belief that many teachers lack this expertise. Although typically not included, reading intervention is a part of balanced literacy instruction as it relates to beginning and struggling readers. No matter how hard we try, we realize that some children need additional one-on-one assistance. We also know that to be successful, this intervention must be early and intensive.

Assessment goes hand in hand with quality reading and writing instruction. Assessment provides teachers with important information that will guide the reading and writing processes and has particular implications for small-group reading instruction. Assessment will, in fact, assist the teacher in making critical decisions concerning placement and pacing in small-group instruction. Assessment should provide the teacher with a road map for the successful teaching of reading and writing. Both formal and informal assessments can provide important feedback to teachers. Used effectively, this information is instrumental in making curricular decisions that increase literacy learning.

The writing process develops in predictable stages, as does the reading process. Writing is a skill that must be modeled, supported, and practiced. Writing and reading develop together and are therefore taught most successfully as integrated processes. For this reason, writing is included as a part of the small-group reading model presented in this book.

Independent Reading and Writing

Finally, “practice makes perfect” is a phrase that we need to pay closer attention to as teachers. Students get better at reading and writing by practicing these skills at appropriate independent levels. This is the piece of the balanced reading program that can take place while small-group reading groups are being conducted. The biggest mistake made during small-group reading is assigning tasks to the rest of the class that are not at appropriate independent reading or writing levels. Students become frustrated, management problems surface, and off-task behavior is exhibited. Careful planning for independent reading and writing activities promotes quality time spent away from the direct supervision of the teacher.

A Look Ahead

Chapter 2 discusses the two assessment components that support the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model: the Early Reading Screening Instrument (ERSI) and the Reading Review. These assessments provide valuable information for curriculum planning and individual assessment. Using information gained through the ERSI allows teachers to make informed decisions as they assign students for small-group instruction based on individual literacy needs. As literacy levels increase, the Reading Review is useful as teachers continue to track student progress, determine fluency rates, and assign appropriate texts to maximize learning opportunities.

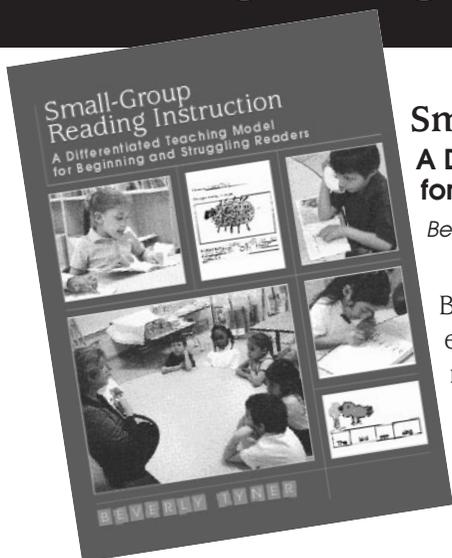
Chapter 3 begins with an in-depth look at the individual strategies of the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model, along with the research that supports them. These components include rereading, word bank, word study, writing, and the new read. The last part of chapter 3 addresses the issue of how to effectively engage the rest of the class during small-group reading instruction. Suggestions for implementing literacy centers, whole-class activities, and follow-up exercises to small-group reading

also are discussed. Finally, classroom management and organizational alternatives are explored.

Chapters 4 through 8 are structured similarly and present the five stages of early reading development. In each chapter, a brief review of student characteristics associated with each specific reading stage is presented followed by appropriate text recommendations. A lesson plan that supports each developmental stage also is included in each of these chapters. Step-by-step directions are given for lesson plan implementation, followed by selected classroom dialogue. Where appropriate, Literacy Center Alerts are included as suggestions for easy-to-implement activities.

The appendixes contain essential information concerning assessment and the materials necessary to implement the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model. Appendix A includes the abbreviated teacher directions for administering the ERSI along with the individual score sheets. Additionally, the testing components are available as blackline masters. Appendix B contains the word study materials, including letter cards, picture cards, and word study cards. Appendix C provides the materials needed for the word scramble and writing activities. The cut-up sentences used in Stage 2 as well as suggested dictated sentences for Stages 3, 4, and 5 are located here. Appendix D holds a variety of auxiliary materials that can be used to support the model.

A new approach to teaching beginning and struggling readers

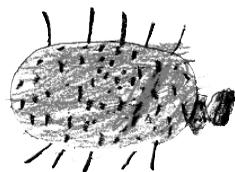


Small-Group Reading Instruction A Differentiated Teaching Model for Beginning and Struggling Readers

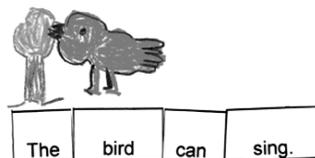
Beverly Tyner

Because of the wide range of learning styles in your elementary classroom, you need a comprehensive reading model that addresses the needs of *all* students. Author and educator Beverly Tyner presents the Small-Group Differentiated Reading Model, an explicit classroom-tested and research-based model that provides effective reading instruction by combining guided reading, word study, and writing in a small-group setting.

How will this model help the students in your classroom?



- Every group of students receives quality reading instruction matched to students' learning needs.
- You can pace instruction in a regular classroom setting to accommodate the learning styles of beginning and struggling readers.
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You'll learn how to apply the model in your classroom, how to successfully group students based on their abilities, and how to continually assess student learning. Plus, right at your fingertips, you'll have easy-to-use lesson plans, activities, and suggested texts to support your students' learning as they progress through the various stages of reading.

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