Differentiation within the Core: Variability and Response to Variability in the Elementary Classroom

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Classroom Instruction for Readers at Multiple Levels
- Most classrooms are comprised of children who are at widely varying levels of literacy development. Instruction needs to be responsive to this variability
  - During whole class instruction by ensuring that instruction takes account of all of the children's needs.
  - During small group instruction by targeting instruction specifically to what the children in the group are ready to learn.

Every child is ready to learn something:
- But they are not all ready to learn the same things
- Instruction will be most effective when it is appropriately targeted and responsive to the needs of individuals.

Levels of Oral Reading Skill in the Primary Grades
- Emergent Readers – limited or no understanding of the role played by print
- Developing Readers – know something about the alphabet and the alphabetic principle
- Maturing Readers – effective word learners who use code-based and meaning-based strategies to puzzle through words
- Proficient Readers – able to quickly analyze and identify unfamiliar words, even those with multiple syllables.
Child differ in a variety of ways that impact their ability to understand the texts they read and hear:

- Background knowledge
- Vocabulary and oral language skills
- Word identification skills
- Beliefs about the purposes for reading
  - Fast and accurate word identification vs. meaning making and expectation that text will make sense
- Motivation

### Multiple Aspects of Differentiation

In the primary grades, we need to attend to both types of difference:

- Code-related
- Meaning-related

We need to differentiate for these differences in:

- Whole class instruction
- Small group instruction
- Center activities

### Responding to Differences in Whole Class Instructional Activities

Differentiation should take account both difference in oral reading skill and in comprehension skills.

### Responsive Teaching during Whole Class Instruction

- Consider the children
- Consider the instructional goals
- Consider the instructional activity
- Teach with the intention to move all of the children forward
Focused on Shared Reading

An Illustration of Differentiation in the Classroom

Teacher thinking before and during a Shared Reading activity -

Instructional Goal: Motivation

- Emergent Readers
  - Encourage enjoyment and engagement with text
- Developing Readers
  - Encourage enjoyment and engagement with text
- Maturing Readers
  - Encourage enjoyment and engagement with text
- Proficient Readers
  - Encourage enjoyment and engagement with text

Teacher thinking before and during a shared reading activity

Instructional Goal: Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

- Emergent Readers
  - Occasionally select books with rhyme and/or alliteration
- Developing Readers
  - Occasionally select books with rhyme and/or alliteration
- Maturing Readers
- Proficient Readers

Teacher thinking before and during a shared reading activity

Instructional Goal: Alphabetics

- Emergent Readers
  - Letter names
- Developing Readers
  - Letter sounds and word families
  - Engage in puzzling through unfamiliar words
- Maturing Readers
  - Larger orthographic units
  - Engage in puzzling through unfamiliar words
- Proficient Readers
Teacher thinking before and during a shared reading activity

Instructional Goal: Word Solving / Word Learning

Emergent Readers
- Model the use of picture cues ("the pictures can help us")

Developing Readers
- Model and encourage the use of partial alphabetic information in combination with contextual information for word solving

Maturing Readers
- Model and encourage the use of alphabetic and orthographic information in word solving

Proficient Readers
- Draw attention to larger orthographic units and meaningful word parts

Instructional Goal: High Frequency Word Knowledge

Emergent Readers
- Draw attention to high frequency words that the children are learning

Developing Readers
- After reading the text, provide an opportunity for the students to do a word hunt.

Maturing Readers
- Occasionally fade voice during choral reading to allow children to retrieve none high frequency words from memory

Proficient Readers

Instructional Goal: Vocabulary and Language

For all –
- Explain the meanings of unfamiliar words as they come up.
- Explain potentially confusing syntactic structures

Instructional Goal: Comprehension

For all –
- Engage the children in actively thinking about meaning of the text before, during, and after reading
- Facilitate the process of making connections between what the children already know and what they encounter in the text.
Responding to Differences in the Context of Small Group Instruction

Children with similar strengths and weaknesses are grouped together and work with more focused teacher guidance.

Children identified as being in need of intervention would, ideally, work with the teacher:
- More often and/or for longer periods of time
- In smaller instructional groups
  - Which allows more focused and explicit teacher guidance
- Using books that are better matched to their current reading levels
- Focusing on foundational skills that are appropriate for their current performance levels.

Instruction for children at risk should be:
- Congruent with the classroom language arts program
- Goal oriented
- Responsive to the strengths and needs of children in the group
- Both targeted and comprehensive
- Provided in smaller groups and/or more frequently than small group instruction provided for children who are not at risk.

Planning for Differentiated Small Group Instruction
- Identify instructional groups
  - Assessment based on instruction/curriculum
    - Are the children learning what has been taught?
- Planning for groups
  - Timing
  - Responsive instruction
  - Flexible grouping, criteria for re-grouping
- Planning for engaging and productive learning activities for centers/stations
Sample Weekly Schedule (Gr. 1)

Components of Small Group Reading Instruction

- Read aloud / Shared Reading / Re-reading (depending on level of development)
- Integrate Phonological Analysis and Alphabets ASAP
- Shared/Supported Reading of New Book
- High Frequency Words
- Modeled Writing / Shared Writing / Supported Writing

Differentiated Small Group Instruction (Hypothetical) First Grade Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reread</td>
<td>All groups</td>
<td>Each child independently reads one or more books or passages from an earlier lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher attends to print concepts and conventions</td>
<td>Teacher attends to initial letter and context</td>
<td>Teacher attends to confirnatory use of print (including single letters and larger orthographic units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher engages children in onset-rime blending</td>
<td>Teacher engages children in phoneme segmentation using sound boxes</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Slide 25

**Differentiated Small Group Instruction**  
**Late K/Early First Grade Class – cont.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alphabet Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher plans to teach a specific decoding skill that can be applied in the new book that each group will read.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sing whole alphabet song a few times, pointing to the letters. Then focus on a few letters that occur frequently in the new book to be read.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce and/or practice letter sounds and/or word family that the children will encounter in the new book.</td>
<td>Depending on the characteristics of the book, teach / review word families or other decoding elements that will enable children to successfully puzzle through unfamiliar words in the new book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Slide 26

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading New Texts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher selects a book that is appropriately challenging and prepares to read the book according to their current needs and the characteristics of the book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>While reading teacher coaches the children to apply their developing word solving skills and engages them in collaborative, meaning-focused conversation about the book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text Selection: Predictable Text</td>
<td>Text Selection: Somewhat but not thoroughly predictable. Texts that provide extensive practice on high frequency words might also be selected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text Selection: Matched to students’ current reading levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Slide 27

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<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Frequency Words</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Word learning is very idiosyncratic. Only words for which the children know all of the letters will be taught</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>High frequency words provide an important anchor for identifying other words in text. Children in each group will practice the high frequency words they are learning using a variety of game-like activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children should be involved in both shared and supported writing — with the teacher specifically focusing on what the children are ready to learn.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Particularly, emphasis is placed on thinking about the beginning sounds in words. Children are encouraged to use their keyword chart to decide on needed letters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher engages children in more thorough sound analysis and spelling of words. Children are encouraged to refer to available resources to support their spelling including the books they have just read, the keyword chart, high frequency word list, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Slide 29

Children make better progress when we meet them where they are.

- Every child is ready to learn something but they are not all ready to learn the same things.
- Instruction needs to be responsive to what the children are ready to learn.
- Teachers, and the instruction they provide, are the most powerful in-school determinants for children's outcomes.

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Thank you for listening!

Thoughts/Questions???