CONTENTS

FIGURE 3
Stages of Beginning Reading

Stage	Appropriate Grade Level	Beginning Student Characteristics	Major Focuses
1 Emergent Reader	Pre-K/K	• Knows less than half the alphabet • Has no concept of word • Has little phonemic awareness • Recognizes a few sight words	• 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	• Knows three quarters or more of the alphabet • Is beginning to track print • Is able to hear some sounds • Recognizes 10 sight words	• 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	• Confirms with beginning and ending consonant sounds • Recognizes 50+ sight words • Reads simple text	• 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	• Recognizes word families in isolation and in texts • Recognizes 100+ sight words • Reads developed text	• Using word patterns in reading and writing • Developing independent reading using decoding and comprehension strategies • Developing fluency
5 Independent Reader	Early/Late Second Grade	• Reads and writes independently • Uses strategies to figure out new words • Reads fluently • Uses word patterns in reading and writing	• Developing diverse comprehension strategies • Using complex word patterns • Developing fluency in a variety of texts • Responding to text in a variety of ways

Implications for Instruction

The ERSI provides an individual profile of each student's literacy knowledge. The teacher learns which students lack foundational alphabet knowledge or concept of word. The spelling assessment is essential in determining where students should begin in word study. For example, students who know their letters and can represent most initial and final consonants are ready for word families. This assessment also identifies students who already are reading some sight words; these students can be assigned to appropriately challenging materials. Students who achieve a total score of 20 or below often need an intensive one-on-one reading intervention program, along with appropriate classroom reading instruction.

Forming Initial Reading Groups

Based on the data gathered from the ERSI, preliminary groupings and instructional decisions can be made. The beginning first-grade class list shown in Table 1 will be used as a basis for discussion. In examining the class chart, divide the group into thirds. If the class is larger, consider four groups that will meet alternately. Realistically, no more than three reading instructional groups can be successfully taught daily. The six students scoring 26 and above possess many of the essential skills for becoming successful readers. They have alphabet knowledge, are able to track print, can represent beginning and ending consonant sounds, and even know some words. Based on this information, these students would be ready for Stage 3 (see Figure 3 on page 8).

The students who fall within the midrange between 17.1 and 22.5 recognize and produce most of the alphabet but need more work in tracking print, understanding concept of word, and identifying beginning and ending consonant sounds. These students should begin in Stage 2.

The students in the lower third of the class need immediate, intensive assistance in both small-group and one-on-one instruction. The students should begin in Stage 1 and focus on concept of word and alphabet recognition. These students should progress quickly to Stage 2 and begin consonant-sound discrimination. Without a strong instructional plan, these students will quickly become at risk for serious reading difficulties.

Grouping students based on information gained from the ERSI provides a basis to make sound instructional decisions. It is imperative that no reading group remains static. Students progress at various rates and must be constantly observed and assessed for regrouping. Shifting students among groups allows each student to be appropriately challenged and always on the instructional edge.

Planning for Larger Class Sizes

Realistically, many classes average 24 or more students; therefore, reading groups cannot meet daily. Be creative in how the students' needs can be best met. Lower-level

students should be seen more frequently. Plan your weekly schedule to include an extra reading group on days that have fewer extra activities, such as music or library.

The following schedule, for four reading groups, allows the lowest two groups (A and B) to be seen four times weekly. The two higher groups are seen three times a week. On Thursday, two special classes (music and gym) reduce the time available for three groups.

Monday	A	B	C
Tuesday	A	B	C
Wednesday	A	B	D
Thursday	A	D	
Friday	B	C	D

Another schedule for four reading groups allows two groups to meet per day, with each group meeting for approximately 30 minutes. Although this schedule allows for only minimal reading instruction, some small-group instruction is better than none.

Monday	A	B
Tuesday	C	D
Wednesday	A	B
Thursday	C	D
Friday	A	B

Look for additional assistance with reading groups. Teaching assistants can conduct a reading group by following a structured lesson plan. Title I teachers, inclusion teachers, student teachers, and regular volunteers also have been successful in assisting with this small-group instruction. The more often each group is seen, the more powerful the instructional impact.

Continual Evaluations

Administering portions of the ERSI can give an objective measure of a child's individual growth. Instead of administering these parts of the test individually, the assessment can be done in small groups. For example, by administering the Alphabet Recognition subtest, the teacher can find out exactly which letters still need to be taught.

The spelling assessment also is useful to readminister as a measure of growth. Figure 7 compares Paul's spelling performance at the beginning of the school year with his performance at the end of the school year.

Pacing

The most important factor that drives student reading achievement is appropriate instructional pacing. In other words, are students moving too quickly or too slowly within a reading group? My experience has been that as cautious, conscientious teachers