

IV. READING

English is an alphabetic language in which there is a relationship between the spelling of a word, its pronunciation and meaning. Beginning to read involves constructing a link between speech and print. Children have to learn to decode, that is to associate sounds with letters and blend those sounds into words, and then learn to recognize words automatically. Decoding and word recognition skills are the foundation of reading comprehension. Without these basic skills, children cannot focus on the meaning of text. Therefore, a primary goal of this program is to develop decoding and word recognition skills.

Decoding and word recognition are best taught using decodable text in which the vocabulary is controlled to contain only previously taught sounds. It is counterproductive to teach children that a = /ă/ and then ask them to read the words *cake* and *away*. They need reading material in which they can practice their decoding skills and avoid using inappropriate strategies, such as guessing at unfamiliar words. In this program, decodable text is provided in two forms: word phrase and sentence lists in the *Ready to Read* and *Stepping Up in Reading* books and stories and non-fiction selections in the *Merrill Reading Program*.

Learning disabled children have particular problems developing accurate and fluent reading due to difficulties in phonologic skills, word retrieval or visual memory for symbols. Their progress, though steady, may be slow and they will need extra practice reading decodable text before they can read books with uncontrolled vocabularies.

Teaching comprehension is also part of every lesson. The goals in teaching reading comprehension are to improve children's ability to understand information in a particular text and to improve children's use of reading strategies that will transfer to reading other material. Good readers monitor their comprehension and employ a variety of strategies, such as rereading, to correct misunderstandings. Many students benefit from having these strategies explained and modeled. Direct instruction, time-on-task and reinforcement are as important in teaching comprehension as they are in decoding.

The key strategy for teaching beginning readers is to have them read aloud with a teacher in a book at an appropriate level of difficulty, one that they can read with 95% accuracy. Oral reading provides the opportunity to monitor and correct errors, to teach comprehension strategies and to model fluent reading. If possible, divide into smaller groups so that each child has more opportunity to read aloud. Having children read to themselves or to other children are not effective instructional techniques. Children must read aloud to an adult daily.

The reading section of the daily lesson has four components:

- **word, phrase and sentence lists** for developing accuracy and fluency
- **text reading** for developing comprehension
- **reading practice** for developing accuracy and fluency
- **reading to children** for developing listening comprehension and enhancing background knowledge