

Title: *Learning to Read Words: Linguistic Units and Strategies*

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Subject(s): Intervention, Phonological and Phonemic Awareness, Phonics and Decoding

Grade Level: 1–2

Synopsis: The question of which, and how many, word-recognition strategies should be taught to first-grade children has long perplexed practitioners. In this study, Juel and Minden-Cupp analyze word-recognition instruction in four first-grade classrooms to begin to identify the instructional practices that best foster learning to read words for particular profiles of children. Juel and Minden-Cupp observed four demographically similar classrooms over a period of a year. In each classroom, students were organized into reading groups of varying abilities. Instructional practice varied widely across these classrooms; phonics and phonemic-awareness activities, for example, were more common in Classrooms 2 and 4 than in the other two. And while children in Classrooms 2, 3, and 4 were on average reading at or above their grade level by the end of the year, the only low-group children who were reading at grade level were those in Classrooms 2 and 4. The findings suggest that differential instruction may be helpful in first grade; that children who enter first grade with low literacy benefit from early exposure to phonics, moving later toward the increased vocabulary and text discussion that serves their higher-range peers well; and that a structured phonics curriculum that includes both onsets/rimes and sounding and blending phonemes within the rimes appears to be very effective.

Quote(s): “By far the most successful classroom for ‘low’ group children was characterized by phonics first and fast. . . . The teacher in this successful classroom provided a heavy dose of phonics at the beginning of the year for the ‘low’ group and then moved onto other activities, namely vocabulary and comprehension, by February.” (30) “Of course, the form of phonics instruction mattered. A structured phonics curriculum that included both onsets/rimes and the sound and blending of phonemes within the rimes seemed very effective.” (30)