

Subject Area: English/Language Arts (Reading/Literature)

Grade Level(s): Early Elementary

Title of Instructional Method: The FISH Strategy: A Method for Moving from Sight Words to Decoding

Description of Instructional Method:

This strategy, called The FISH Strategy, was designed to help students learn to move from known high frequency or sight words to decoding unknown words using onsets and rimes. The FISH strategy makes explicit what students must do to decode unknown words using onsets and rimes. Students learn to “fish” for new words using words they know. FISH stands for steps in the decoding process, they are as follows:

- Find the rime (the first vowel and the rest of the word)
- Identify the rime or a word you know that ends like that
- Say the rime (the word you know without the first sound)
- Hook the new onset (beginning sound) to the rime

References:

- Whitaker, S., Harvey, M., Hassell, L., Linder, T., Tutterrow, D. (2006) The fish strategy: moving from sight words to decoding. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38 (5), p.14-18. (Booth Library, Academic Search Premier).
- Smith, S. (2000). *Onset and rime*. Retrieved January 12, 2007, from *Special Needs Information Press*. <http://www.crossboweducation.com/snipsnip.htm> (website)
- Carl, C. (n.d.) *Learning High Frequency Words*. Retrieved January 13, 2007, from <http://www.teachers.santee.k12.ca.us/carl/Document/Learning%20High%%20Frequency%20Words.doc>. Carl’sCornerHomePage<http://www.teachers.santee.k12.ca.us/carl/> (website)

“How-To” Information:

The FISH strategy is taught by first introducing the strategy to the students by providing guided practice with relatively easy words using only a few known rimes. Then as the students advance the teacher may provide rimes that are more difficult. Before beginning this strategy, it is said the student should be “at the full-alphabetic stage as this strategy moves them into the orthographic or consolidated alphabetic stage” (Whitaker, 15). This means that the student needs to have a range of well-known sight words that they can read without guessing. The FISH strategy works best when students are at a “late first to beginning third grade” reading level (Whitaker, 16).

This strategy is taught using the same steps that are used to teach any other teaching strategies: pretest and obtain commitment to learn, describe the strategy, model the strategy, verbally practice the strategy, use controlled practice and feedback, provide advanced practice, posttest and commitment, and generalization of the FISH strategy in all subjects. In each of these steps, the teacher is guiding the student toward the ultimate goal using this strategy when reading without a prompt. This strategy should be taught for about fifteen to twenty minutes each day, in about four weeks most students should learn the strategy, use it in words that have rimes they have been taught, and progress to generalizing the strategy and use it with words they have not been taught.

To implement this strategy in a classroom a teacher would need to first make learning sight words part of his/her curriculum. Several practice activities for learning sight words is found on the website, *Learning High Frequency Words* by Cherry Carl. One of the activities has the students write the sight words on a personal size chalkboard or dry erase board to practice spelling them repeatedly. The student should erase the word each time they write it, this ensures that they are not just copying the words one after the

other. This site also has ideas for practice using games. One game called “I Have, Who Has?” allows every student to participate and helps him or her become familiar with the words. The game is played by the teacher passing out sight word cards to every student and keeping an identical stack to read and show to the students, the student containing that card should raise his/her hand and bring it forward. The goal is for students to be able to identify the sight word on their card, thus leading to familiarity of the words.

After the student is comfortable using sight words, and has memorized a majority of them, the teacher may begin using the onset and rime to help move the student into decoding. One method to make this strategy work is found in the *Onset and Rime* website by Stephanie Smith; it says to start teaching the student the sight words by having them use plastic letters for spelling of the words. Then as the student advances, the teacher could have the student use onset and rime to add letters to some of the sight words to make new words. For example the word “at” may be a memorized sight word, but to help the student learn to decode new words the teacher may have him/her put a different letter at the beginning and/or end of the word (c-at, b-at, m-at-e, etc.).

Other suggestions for practice activities are found with the FISH strategy and it says to have the students play games with onsets and rimes. One game that is very fitting for the title is “fishing” for words. Students use a small “fishing pole” with a magnet on the end to pick up paper cut outs of fish with different words written on them. They then identify the rime and use the FISH strategy to read the word so they may keep the fish. This practice helps the students become familiar with the strategy, thus leading to ease when using it elsewhere.

Implications for Practice/Other Considerations:

The above mentioned practice activities are ways this strategy may be used in the classroom to help teach students with and without special learning needs. This strategy provides diverse methods of practice that allows for many different types of learners to benefit. However, the amount of materials and activities that are suggested may prove to be too time consuming, one must choose the activities to use based on the type of students in the class. Students must also know the high frequency or sight words and they need to be able to recognize onsets and rimes to fully participate and progress from these activities.

Additional Links:

<http://www.succeedtoread.com/learntoread.html>

www.dolch-words.com

EIU Candidate Names:

Sarah Harvard

Emily Wynn

Christina Harmon

Vanessa Worsley