Chapter 16
How Foundational Writing Informs Early Decoding Skills in Virtual Instruction

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ABSTRACT

How do you teach a child to read in a virtual classroom? Answering this question can feel like a daunting task – the new kindergartener, five-years-old, may not be able to navigate the virtual classroom because they do not yet possess the skill of reading. When the act of teaching reading takes up the majority of instructional time in the early elementary classroom, this task can seem impossible in online learning environments. This chapter presents methods and approaches for teaching early reading and writing virtually. Specifically, the chapter covers developmental levels for reading and writing, technological frameworks for engaging students in virtual instruction, and applications of virtual instruction to early literacy instruction. The chapter serves as a practical toolkit for teachers to help set students up for success without hindering their knowledge of skills that will be essential to their learning in the future.

INTRODUCTION

How do you teach a child to read in a virtual classroom? Answering this question can feel like a daunting task. The new kindergarteners, five-years-old, may not be able to navigate the virtual classroom because they do not yet possess the skill of reading. When the act of teaching reading takes up the majority of instructional time in the early elementary classroom, this task can seem impossible in online learning environments (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Foorman et al., 2016). Moreover, children need the skill of reading to complete their other assignments related to mathematics, science, and social studies. While teaching reading virtually is challenging, it can be done, with intentional practice, a variety of strategies, and differentiating the learning process (Alexander, 2020). Additionally, teachers can integrate founda-

tional writing skills in virtual settings to inform early reading skills, primarily those related to decoding (Graham, 2020; Hall et al., 2015).

This chapter is focused toward answering the question of how educators teach reading in virtual settings. First, an overview of what constitutes reading provides an overview of the developmental progressions of reading. Next, a discussion describes how foundational writing skills inform early reading achievement. And finally, the chapter identifies strategies, resources, and frameworks for teachers to utilize to instruct both emergent reading and writing in virtual classrooms. This chapter, therefore, serves as a practical toolkit for teachers to help set students up for success in virtual learning environments without hindering their knowledge of skills that will be essential to their learning in the future.

WHAT IS READING?

As of 2020, reading is getting more attention as the "science of reading" paradigm sweeps the United States. The science of reading indicates that children learn to read by the simple view of reading (Cervetti et al., 2020; Petscher, 2020), developing language skills and decoding skills that lead to comprehension. This view of reading focuses on explicit, systematic instruction with oral language and phonemic awareness, the understanding and ability to manipulate sounds that make up the language. Then, children receive targeted instruction on phonics, which is the knowledge of how letters and sounds work together in patterns to create words.

In 2000, a group of literacy experts called the National Reading Panel (NRP), published their results of a systematic review of research on reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). The panel concluded that the five components of any reading program are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The science of reading focuses strongly on the first two components, phonemic awareness and phonics, while other frameworks for reading build the other three components.

When teaching reading skills, the prevalent belief is that all five components of the NRP report should be taught in conjunction (Fisher et al., 2019; Reutzel & Cooter, 2018). With emergent readers, a progression of skills develops from first developing phonemic awareness skills, then moving into phonics, with considerations of comprehension for both. Once students have basic phonics skills, they begin to work on fluency as they further develop their phonics skills. Vocabulary is also interspersed in all aspects of reading as children develop their decoding skills and other literacy skills (Clay, 2001; Doyle, 2013).

According to recent research (Kosanovich & Verhagen, 2012), along with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association, 2010), reading follows a progression of layered skills that include print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency. These skills progress as students move through elementary grades, with the exception of phonological awareness, which should be limited to the early elementary grades. However, while these skills progress in developmental levels, they also layer. For example, children in kindergarten should be practicing fluency skills, which will look different from the fluency skills practiced by a fifth-grade student. The following section describe the developmental process of learning to read (see Figure 1), aligning it with foundational writing and discussing how technology and virtual pedagogy fosters these skills. This discussion is limited to kindergarten and first grade, as those are the grades in which students build the foundational skills of learning to read.

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