

Whole and Small Group Instruction

*An Overview of Evidence-Based Literacy
Instruction*

Thursday, June 12, 2025
10:00-11:00 am

Brought to you by
Martin Luther College Continuing Education

Presenters: Dr. Cindy Whaley



Structured Literacy:

This approach emphasizes the systematic and explicit teaching of language structure, including phonology, spelling, vocabulary, and morphology. It also involves a diagnostic approach, where teachers understand and respond to students' learning processes.



Structured literacy promotes both whole group and small group instruction to ensure all students receive effective, explicit, and systematic instruction. Whole group instruction provides a foundational knowledge and shared learning experiences, while small group instruction allows for targeted, differentiated support and deeper engagement with specific needs.



In whole group instruction, the idea is that **all students will receive the same instruction at the same time and be successful in learning the same skill.** With quick checks like a thumbs up or a raised hand, a teacher knows if some understand their lesson and if some need additional instruction.

Whole Group Instruction



Benefits of Whole Group Instruction:

1. **Efficient Instruction:** Whole group lessons are efficient for delivering core curriculum content and demonstrating skills.
2. **Shared Learning:** Ensures all students are exposed to foundational concepts and engage in collective learning activities.



Benefits of Whole Group Instruction:

- 3. Teacher Expertise:** Provides opportunities for teachers to leverage their expertise to engage students and provide timely feedback.
- 4. Community Building:** Fosters a sense of belonging and collaboration
- 5. Formative Assessment:** Allows for ongoing assessment of student understanding and identification of areas needing targeted support.



Small group reading instruction is very effective when implemented with a structured literacy approach. Structured literacy focuses on the structure of language while small group instruction allows for targeted, differentiated learning. This combination helps teachers provide explicit instruction, address individual student needs, and support the development of essential literacy components like phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension.

Small Group Instruction



Small Group Instruction:

This allows for more individualized instruction than whole-class teaching, enabling teachers to address specific student needs and learning gaps. Students can be grouped based on similar skills or areas of need, allowing for targeted support and differentiation.

Benefits:

Small- group instruction can help students gain confidence, participate in discussions, and develop their reading skills.



Effectiveness:

Research suggests that small group instruction can be particularly effective when used as intervention or supplemental grouping, being twice as effective as whole-group instruction.

The Key Benefits of Using Small-Group Instruction

Small-group learning has many benefits that traditional whole-group instruction cannot offer. Teaching a whole class at once is a one-size-fits-all approach that may leave some students behind and bore others.

Here are a few more examples of the benefits of small-group instruction over more traditional methods:

- Students receive individualized instruction from teachers.
- Lessons are tailored to match each student's interests, abilities, or learning styles.
- Students are more likely to actively engage with lessons.
- Teachers see enhanced collaboration and communication skills among students.
- Teachers can more easily support students with diverse needs.
- Students have more opportunities to ask questions and receive direct feedback.



The benefits of small-group instruction transcend grade levels. It's a versatile and effective educational approach from kindergarten through high school and beyond. In elementary grades, small-group settings allow for targeted interventions to address specific student needs.

Key Features of Structured Literacy in Small Groups:

Systematic Instruction: Skills are taught in a logical, sequential order

Explicit Instruction: Teachers clearly and directly explain concepts.

Differentiated Instruction: Groups are formed based on specific needs, and instruction is tailored accordingly.

Ongoing Assessment: Teachers monitor student progress and adjust instruction as needed.

Repetition and Practice: Students receive multiple opportunities to practice new skills.

Clear Learning Objectives: Students are aware of what they are expected to learn.

Engaging Activities: Activities are designed to keep students motivated and engaged.



Key Elements of Centers in Structured Literacy

In a structured literacy classroom, centers are stations where students practice literacy skills introduced during whole group instruction, allowing for independent and differentiated practice. These centers provide a structured, purposeful way to reinforce concepts and support student learning.



- 1. Targeted Practices:** Centers focus on specific skills and concepts taught in whole-group, allowing students to apply their learning independently.
- 2. Differentiated Instruction:** Center can be adapted to meet the needs of different learners with activities tailored to reading and writing levels.
- 3. Decodable Books:** Centers can be based on decodable books to provide explicit practice with sound symbol correspondence and reading fluency.
- 4. Structured Activities:** Centers are designed with clear instructions, routines, and expectations to ensure student success and independence.
- 5. Integration with Whole-Group Instruction:** Centers complement whole-group lessons by providing additional practice and application of learned skills.

6. Teacher Monitoring and Support: While designed for independent work, centers provide opportunities for teachers to monitor student progress, provide feedback, and offer individualized support.

7. Encoding Center: Students can practice spelling words related to a specific sound or concept.

8. Reading Fluency Center: Students can use decodable books or passages to practice reading with accuracy and speed.

9. Writing Center: Students can practice writing sentences or paragraphs related to a specific topic or genre.

10. Vocabulary Center: Students can explore new vocabulary words through games, charts, or activities.

Benefits of Using Centers in Your Classroom:



Differentiated Instruction: Centers allow for flexible instruction, catering to individual student needs and learning styles.

Increased Engagement: Centers can be designed to be engaging and motivating for students, fostering a love of literacy.

Improved Classroom Management: Centers provide opportunities to create a structured and organized classroom environment, reducing disruptions and improving student focus.

Enhanced Student Independence: Centers provide opportunities for students to work independently, developing self regulation and self direction skills.

Opportunity for Teacher-Student Interaction: While students work independently. Centers offer opportunities for teachers to engage in one-on-one or small group instruction.

Whole-group instruction delivers core content to all students, while small-group instruction allows for differentiated and targeted learning. Individual instruction focuses on one-on-one support and tailored learning experiences. Small-group instruction can be used for both initial teaching and as a way to reinforce concepts, while also providing personalized practice.

OUR JOY OF
TEACHING READING!!



Resources:

- <https://www.nellkduke.org/effective-practices>
- *Shifting the Balance (K-2)* Burkins and Yates
- *Shifting the Balance (3-5)* Cunningham, Burkins, and Yates
- *Building Literacy with Multilingual Learners* 3rd Ed. Lems, Soro, and Charles
- What are the Biggest Benefits of Small Group Instruction? Elevate K-12/Elevate in Action
- Collaborative Classroom
- Multiple books by Debbie Diller concerning literacy centers
- www.mrsrichardsonsclass.com
- (a variety of structured literacy center ideas)
- <https://learn.jenniferfindley.com/reading-centers>
- (4th and 5th grade reading centers)