Triple R Teaching

Hello, hello! Anna Geiger here from The Measured Mom, and you are listening to Episode 70 of the Triple R Teaching podcast. We are working our way through our phonics series, and today we're going to talk about the phonics skills we need to teach, a recommended order, and how those might fit into different grade levels.

I want to start with a disclaimer, as I always do. There is no perfect scope and sequence. This is how I approach it, but there's plenty of room for flexibility.

One thing we can all agree on is that we start in kindergarten with letter sounds. Now, there's a big debate over whether we teach letter names with letter sounds or just letter sounds. I'm definitely in the names AND sounds camp, but I won't go into that too much in this podcast episode because it probably will get its own episode in the future.

Some tips for beginning phonics instruction with letter sounds is to make sure that you include high-utility sounds at the beginning, along with a common short vowel, so that words can be built and read as soon as possible. So, in other words, we're not going to teach the sound of X at the beginning. We're going to teach things like the sound of S and M and so on, especially those letters that you can sustain, like /s/ and /m/.

But our number one goal is to make sure we choose a collection of letters and sounds that children can use to read words. In my scope and sequence, I actually have the letter J towards the beginning, but that's because I use it in our first decodable book. Because of that, I need to put it towards the beginning, even though it's not as high utility of a sound. My goal is to get them to read stories, and that was the letter I needed to tell a story at the very beginning.

As you're teaching students these short vowel sounds and consonant sounds and you're helping them put them together to read VC words like "am" or "in" and CVC words like "cat" and "bit," you also could consider including common consonant digraphs in your instruction. That's actually how I do it. I sprinkle those about halfway through. We start sprinkling in ending "ck," "sh," "th," "ch," and "wh." Some people wait to teach those until they've taught all the consonant sounds, and that's perfectly fine, but this is just one thing to consider. It allows them to read more words, and you can tell better stories too.

After teaching letter sounds and how to blend them together to read VC and CVC words, I would go ahead and teach the floss rule. Now this is something that's very common in Orton-Gillingham circles. The idea is that when you have a single syllable short vowel word, you're going to double the final letter if it's the /s/, /z/, /f/, or /l/ sound. For example, the word "off." It's a single syllable word, we have a short vowel O and we have the /f/ at the end, so we're going to double the F.

You can decide if your students are ready to learn the rule or if that feels like way too much, but you can certainly teach them to read those words. It's very simple, it will open up more words they can read, and it's just a nice place to squeeze that in.

Something else I think we easily forget to do is to recognize that, at this point, even in kindergarten, students can read two-syllable words if those two syllables are made up of individual syllables that they can read. So for example, the word "catnip," a child could read that word because they can read "cat" and they can read "nip." Or if you've taught digraphs, they can read the word "bathtub." That's why, in my Ultimate Collection of Phonics Word Lists, I include very simple compound words that students, even in kindergarten, can read once you've taught them to read CVC words and basic digraphs.

Moving on, most programs will teach blends. Some put it off a little bit later, but for most, that's what comes next. Blends are when you have two, sometimes three, consonants that each have their own individual sound, but they sort of blend together.

Now this is another hot topic. Many people think there's no reason to teach blends, and that it's a confusing name because it sounds like blending. I personally think that helping students notice blends, read words with blends, and spell words with blends is good practice.

I like to think of them as three groups: L-blends, R-blends, and S-blends. Then I would move into ending blends, which are a little trickier, but also really good to focus on.

One thing I want to note, if you are doing phoneme-grapheme mapping, which I hope you are (it's when you dictate a word and then have students separate the words into sounds and spell each sound), I would encourage you to make sure that you include a blend as two sounds. In the Orton-Gillingham program that I'm following, they actually have one blank for a blend, but then they separate it with two smaller blanks underneath. Personally, I think that's confusing. I think it would be better to have a

single line for each part of the blend. For example, in the word "frog," you would have four lines for /f/, /r/, /ŏ/, /g/.

Also, when you have letter tiles, make sure that blends do not have their own letter tile. I would personally separate them, so you wouldn't have a tile that says "fl". You would have an F tile and an L tile, and that's because when they're switching things around in the word, you only need to take out one letter of a blend to change it. So for the word "slip," if you want to change it to "snip," you would just slide out the L and put in the N. So consider that as you're teaching blends.

Following this, I like to teach the "ng" and "nk" endings. Technically, "ng" is a digraph, and "nk" is a blend. It's a little bit confusing, but it can be helpful to teach those as word families. That's the way Orton-Gillingham usually approaches it. You could teach "ing," "ang," "ong," and so on. I don't think you NEED to teach them as word families, but that's one thing to consider.

Then we have some tricky long vowel ending blend word families, which are in very different places depending on your phonics scope and sequence. I think it's okay to teach them here. These would be the endings like "ild," "old," "ind," "olt," and "ost." They look like the vowel should be short, but it's actually long.

Then, believe it or not, I do think you can teach the concept of open and closed syllables in kindergarten. There are a lot of really great resources out there with an open and closed door, and I'm sure there's plenty of free YouTube videos you can watch to teach your students about this concept, but just to understand that when you have a vowel at the end of a syllable, it usually makes the long vowel sound. You can also make the schwa sound, but we're not going to talk about that right now, but I think it's a good idea because when they get to reading multisyllable words, that's something that's going to come in handy.

Now in my scope in sequence, this is where kindergarten ends, but that doesn't mean I think that every kindergartener should stop at this point. I have a little boy who's a pretty accelerated reader. He's reading chapter books, and he is in kindergarten, middle way through. I would not want his teacher to say, "Okay, well, we've taught open and closed, and now we're done because that's kindergarten." I would hope that the teacher would group students by phonics knowledge and then put them wherever that tends to be. So if his teacher were doing that, she could put him in a much more advanced group, even though she's teaching kindergarten.

In my scope and sequence, we're moving now into level two, which is actually first grade. That's when, if you'd like, you can start to teach syllable division strategies. Now,

this gets confusing. I am not 100% sold on syllable division strategy teaching, just because it gets very complicated and can take a lot of time. I'm not going to give a hard and fast yes or no right now, but if you would teach it, this would be the time to teach it.

Then you'll also want to teach them about common suffixes like "ed" ends a word, and that there are different sounds for "ed."

Next, I would teach CVCE words, those are sometimes called "magic e words." I used to call them "silent e words," but I wouldn't do that anymore because silent e is in many different words, but here we're talking about the E that changes the sound of the vowel. So in the word "rake," the E at the end of the word changes the sound of the A. A better example probably would be the word "same." Instead of "Sam," we have "same." "Rake" is a little tricky because if it's a short vowel word, it ends with "ck," but you get the idea.

There is debate in the science of reading community of whether or not students need to learn about syllable types. There are six or seven syllable types, depending on how you divide them up, and personally, I'm a syllable type fan. I don't think it's all that complicated, and I don't think it has to take a lot of time. Understanding syllable types can help students as they approach multisyllable words.

With that understanding, I would recommend at this time teaching your students to read multisyllable words that include the CVCE pattern. For example, if they've learned all the phonics skills you've taught so far, they can read a word like "classmate." The first part has the floss rule, and the second part has the CVCE syllable type.

Moving on, you could teach another suffix, "ing," less common digraphs and trigraphs like "wr," "kn," "ph," and so on, and then we're going to get into common vowel teams.

I've seen different approaches for this. I've seen a program that actually recommends teaching the sound and then all the spellings all at once, or maybe a few in kindergarten and adding more in first grade and adding more in second grade. Personally, I like the idea of dripping them out more slowly so we can work toward mastery, but I don't want to say there's a right or wrong here, because I don't believe that there is. If you have a very skilled teacher, you could do it the other way.

Common vowel teams that I recommend starting with would be "ee" and "ea" as in "eat," "ai," "ay," "oa," and so on. If you check out the links in the show notes, you'll be

able to find a link to my full scope and sequence, where I lay it all out.

Now this probably won't surprise you, but I think that after you've taught common vowel teams, you want to teach the vowel team syllable type, so once kids know a lot of these common teams, they can read multisyllable words like "hayseed," "firewood," and "raindrop."

Again, in my Ultimate Collection of Phonics Word Lists, I've got all these words for you right in order. The nice thing about the guide is if you follow my scope and sequence, the words that are listed in the guide can only be read, technically, if students have mastered the previous skills. There's not a bunch of mix up. If you choose to follow my scope and sequence, the guide is the perfect supplement for you.

Moving on, you can focus on teaching the spelling of the /k/ ending of words, whether it's K, "ck," or "ke."

Then we've got r-controlled vowels. This is really the bugaboo, I think. It's all over the place. Some people teach it right after CVC words, some people teach it more in the middle, and some people teach it way over here. This one was a real struggle for me is to figure out where to put it, but in the end, I went with the Orton-Gillingham approach. I don't think it's wrong to teach it earlier, this is just how I've chosen to go, but there's plenty of options.

When we're teaching r-controlled vowels, we want to teach students the spellings of words with the /er/, /ar/, and /or/ sounds. Then, of course, you want to go on and teach the r-controlled vowels syllable types.

Now in my scope and sequence, we're coming to the end of first grade. The next section moves into second. It is not to say, again, that plenty of first graders aren't already moving on to this. It depends on where they land when you assess them at the beginning of the year or midyear or whatever. Plenty of kids in first grade will be moving on to what I call level three.

Level three would be diphthongs and complex vowels. The diphthongs are "oi" and "oy" (the /oy/ sound because your mouth changes as you turn into the next vowel). Then you've got "ow," where you can feel the change in your mouth again. I've often included "aw" as a diphthong, but technically, it's really not because your mouth doesn't really change. I just find it really hard to find a place for it, so this is where I teach "aw." I call it a complex vowel. That's just kind of a tricky one.

Then, of course, there's a diphthong syllable type. Some people don't separate vowel team and diphthong syllable types. I chose to do that in my scope and sequence because that's how Orton-Gillingham approaches it, but you could just lump diphthongs in with vowel team syllable types if you want to keep it extra simple. At this point, you could teach more syllable division principles if you wanted.

Then I want to talk about consonant-le, so words like "apple," "bridle," and "fiddle." This would be the place to teach that ending. Then it's also the consonant-le syllable type, but if your word ends with a consonant-le ending, it's already multisyllable, so there's not a lot of difference here.

Then we could teach words that end with Y as long E like "crispy," "giddy," and "stubby." Of course, you could teach this much earlier as well, it's just where I put it in my scope and sequence.

Then we've got soft and hard C and G, which is a little complicated spelling-wise, but that's where I put that here.

Then we have some less common vowel teams and words with schwa. Now, you probably should have had a lesson about schwa way back when you had your students learn to read multisyllable words with open and closed syllables because, in so many words, the unaccented vowel softens into a schwa.

Actually, schwa is the most common vowel sound that there is, believe it or not, and even my little kindergartner, albeit he is an advanced reader and speller, but he has learned to identify the schwa in a word. For example, in the word "bacon," once he's divided it into syllables, he knows right away that the O represents the schwa because otherwise, it would say /b/ /ā/ /k/ /ŏ/ /n/.

You can help your students recognize when a vowel makes an unexpected sound. I think it's good to note that the schwa sound can be /ə/ or /ə/, because you could say bacon, bacon, bacon {Anna pronounces the word with multiple schwa sounds}. It's a mix, so teach them to listen for the /ə/ or the /ə/ when you wouldn't expect it. The schwa is really important to teach because when students are sounding out multisyllable words, it won't sound like a real word sometimes unless you adjust the vowel. Some people call this flexing the vowel, it's just playing with it until you land on a real word.

Finally, in my scope and sequence, we've got extra spellings like "ch" for "school," just the very uncommon spellings that you might see, and then finally, prefixes and suffixes.

That's a lot that I went through today. Just as a reminder, this is my approach. It doesn't have to be yours, but if you choose to follow it, you're going to especially love my decodable books that follow the scope and sequence.

We just released our first set of books. There are sixteen of them, and they teach short vowel sounds, consonant sounds, and the basic digraphs. We're slowly adding more.

If you're part of our membership, The Measured Mom Plus, you will get each book as it's released, and you won't have to wait for the whole set. In the membership, we do give each book in all its printable options, plus the supplementary resources like the blending lines, the dictation practice, and so on.

Do check out the membership, themeasuredmom.com/membership, if you'd like to get your hands on my resources, but there's certainly plenty available on the main site as well. I'll provide links to those things in the show notes for today, which you can find at themeasuredmom.com/episode70.

Thanks for listening, and I'll talk to you next week!