



Ambitious Expectations

Unlocking Potential with the
Lowest-Performing 20%

October 2021

Contents

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Ambitious Expectations | 5 |
| 2 | Six Unlocking Letters and Sounds Interventions | 7 |
| 3 | Intervention 1 Oral Blending | 9 |
| 4 | Intervention 2 Blend and Find | 11 |
| 5 | Intervention 3 Mix It Up | 13 |
| 6 | Intervention 4 Spot It (Fastest Fingers) | 15 |
| 7 | Intervention 5 Precision Grid | 17 |
| 8 | Intervention 6 Digraph and Trigraph Spotter | 19 |
| 9 | Case Studies | 21 |
| 10 | Unlocking Potential Progress Sheet | 23 |
| 11 | Conclusion | 25 |

"I got my break – big break – when I was five years old, and it's taken me more than 70 years to realise it. You see, at five I learned to read.

It's that simple and it's that profound."

Sean Connery

1 Ambitious Expectations

Unlocking Potential with the Lowest 20%

At **Unlocking Letters and Sounds** we believe that every child can learn to read. For some children learning to read can take longer, and for these children mastering the skills needed to become a fluent and confident reader will require careful and considered support.

We believe that with high quality Wave One teaching, effective keep-up support and some targeted intervention, every child can become a reader.

In this document we aim to give educators practical intervention strategies to support children in overcoming barriers in reading.

A child who is struggling to read will need:

- a well-trained reading teacher or teaching assistant
- an educator with a clear understanding of where the child is struggling
- a targeted intervention that supports them to overcome a barrier
- at least one person who has faith that they will become a reader

Tips for Interventions

- One-to-one intervention
- Clear purposes for the intervention
- Be prepared with **Unlocking Letters and Sounds** resources
- Stay positive
- Simple instructions
- Try to stick to two minutes Appropriate praise (smile, nod or thumbs up)
- Fast, repeated practice
- Close monitoring of progress

**"The whole world opened up to me
when I learned to read."**

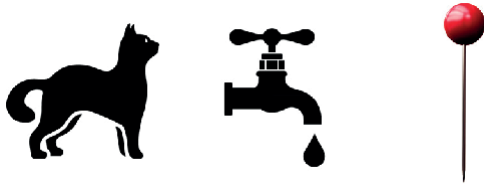
Mary McCleod Bethune

2 Six Unlocking Letters and Sounds Interventions

Unlocking Letters and Sounds has six distinct interventions to support children who are struggling with reading. These are:

- Oral blending
- Blend and find
- Mix it up
- Spot it
- Precision grid
- Digraph and trigraph spotter

Oral blending



To support a child who cannot blend sounds.

Spot it



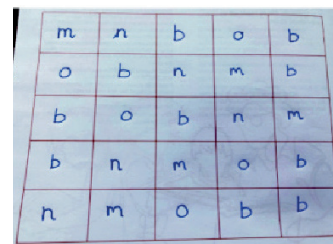
To support a child to recognise a given GPC.

Blend and find



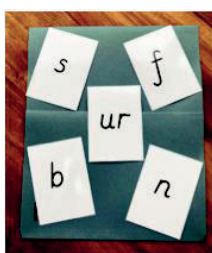
To support a child that is beginning to blendsome sounds

Precision grid



To support a child to recognise a given GPC.

Mix it up



To support a child to blend.

Digraph and trigraph spotter



To support a child to spot and read digraphs or trigraphs in words.

3 Intervention 1

Oral Blending

To support a child who cannot blend sounds.

Resources Four picture cards

1. **'My turn'**
Show the child one picture. Sound-talk the word slowly to match the picture. Do not say the word.
2. **'Your turn'**
The child sound-talks the same word.
3. **'My turn'**
Repeat at a faster pace and blend to say the word.
4. Pass the picture to the child.
5. **'Your turn'**
The child sound-talks the word and blends it to say the word.
6. Repeat the process with all four pictures.
7. Then sound-talk a picture. The child should point to the correct picture. As the child points, they should sound-talk the picture and blend to say the word.

4 Intervention 2 Blend and Find

To support a child that is beginning to blend some sounds.

Resources Show a picture of a scene – e.g. a farmyard, supermarket, garden, etc which has four objects in it that can be recognised and sound-talked

1. **'My turn'**
Show the child the picture. Sound-talk to the child one of the objects that can be seen in the picture. Do not say the word.
2. **'Your turn'**
The child sound-talks the same word.
3. **'My turn'**
Repeat at a faster pace and ask the child to say the word.
4. **'Your turn'**
The child sound-talks the word and blends it to say the word. The child then points to the object in the scene.
5. Repeat the process for the other three objects in the picture.

5 Intervention 3 Mix It Up

To support a child to blend.

Resources Flashcards and word cards

1. Choose a focus grapheme that the child knows well.
2. Choose two words that feature that grapheme. The .Unlocking Letters and Sounds handbooks contain lists of suggested words for each grapheme.
3. **'My turn'**
Make one word using the grapheme flashcards. Point to each grapheme and say the phoneme. Then sweep your finger from left to right under the flashcards and say the whole word.
4. **'Your turn'**
The child repeats Step 3 with their flashcards.
5. **'My turn'**
The adult models mixing up the flashcards, then puts them into the correct order, saying the phoneme for each grapheme. Then they sweep their finger under the cards and say the word.
6. **'Your turn'**
The child repeats Step 3 with their flashcards.
7. Repeat Steps 3 to 6 with a second word containing the focus grapheme.
8. Then say, 'Now we will read the words fluently.' Show each of the words on a word card and ask the child to read the words aloud.

6 Intervention 4

Spot It (Fastest Fingers)

To support a child to recognise a given GPC.

Resources Flashcards

1. Identify a grapheme which the child is not secure with.
2. Show the grapheme on a flashcard.
3. **'My turn'**
Say the phoneme as your finger traces over the letter or letters. If it's a digraph or trigraph, tell the child the letter name for each letter. Then repeat the phoneme.
4. **'Your turn'**
The child says the phoneme three times when shown the flashcard.
5. Put the grapheme in with a small collection of known graphemes.
6. Ask, 'Can you spot the new grapheme?'
7. Show each flashcard in turn and wait for the child to say the sound.
8. If the child correctly identifies the grapheme, shuffle the cards and repeat.
9. If the child doesn't recognise the grapheme, tell them the phoneme. Ask the child to repeat and then put it closer to the front of the pack of flashcards.

7 Intervention 5 Precision Grid

To support a child to recognise a given GPC.

Resources Flashcards and pre-prepared grid (see next page)

1. Identify one GPC that the child is not secure in and three GPCs that they can confidently identify.
2. Show the child the focus grapheme on a flashcard. Say, 'This is the grapheme /p/. What's the sound?'
3. The child says the sound three times.
4. Place the letters in the 5-by-5 grid. Ensure that the focus sound is written twice on each line.
5. The child looks at the grid and points to each grapheme in turn, saying the matching phoneme.
6. Continue until the child reaches the end. Then show the flashcards again to check that the child can remember the phoneme.

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8 Intervention 6

Digraph and Trigraph Spotter

To support a child to spot and read digraphs or trigraphs in words.

Resources Flashcards or word cards

1. Select a digraph or trigraph that the child is confident to identify when shown a flashcard.
2. Show the child the flashcard and ask them, 'What's the sound?' Repeat this three times.
3. Have a word containing the problem digraph or trigraph on a card.
4. **'My turn'**
Explain that you will place sound buttons on the word and then sound-talk the word. Remember that the digraph or trigraph will need a line under each letter.
5. **'Your turn'**
The child repeats this with their own word card.
6. **'My turn'**
Sound-talk the word whilst pointing at the sound buttons and then saying the word.
7. **'Your turn'**
The child sound-talks the word and says the word.
8. Repeat with three more words.
9. Then show the child the three word cards and ask them to read the words fluently.

9 Case Studies

Case Study No. 1

Emily is a Reception child who is starting Phase 2. She can recognise her graphemes, but is having trouble hearing the word when she sound-talks the phonemes. When the teachers asks her to get her c-oa-t, she is not sure what she is being asked to do.

Suggested intervention – Oral Blending

Case Study No. 2

Eric is a Year 1 child who is struggling to spot digraphs within words. He is able to recognise GPCs when shown flashcards, but cannot spot them when reading a book.

Suggested intervention – Digraph Spotter

Case Study No. 3

Sam is Year 2 child who is struggling to recognise the GPC au, despite being secure in the other Phase 5 GPCs taught so far.

Suggested intervention – Precision Grid, or Spot It.2

10 Unlocking Potential Progress Sheet

Identifying a child's exact barrier in reading can enable the teacher to target an intervention at their exact area of need. This **Unlocking Potential Progress Sheet** will help the teacher to unpick the area of difficulty for each learner and suggest possible interventions to enable the child to move forward in their reading.

| Area of difficulty Grapheme phoneme correspondence | Suggested intervention |
|---|---|
| Unable to recognise Phase 2 graphemes on sight s a t p i n m d g o c k c k e u r h b f ff l ll ss | Spot it Precision grid |
| Unable to recognise Phase 3 graphemes on sight j v w x y z zz qu ch sh th/th ng ai ee igh oa oo/oo ar or ur ow oi ear air ure er | |
| Unable to recognise Phase 5a graphemes on sight ay ou ie oy ir ue aw wh ph ew oe au a-e e-e i-e o-e u-e | |
| Unable to recognise Phase 5b graphemes on sight ae ye e e y ey o a igh i ie y ar a al oa o ow ou ou ur ear or oo u oul oo u ui e ea i y j g g edge c ch sh ch ti ci ssi ch tch t | |
| Unable to recognise Phase 5c graphemes on sight mb kn gn r wr u o-e o ear ere eer or our augh air ear are ere | |

| Area of difficulty Grapheme phoneme correspondence | Suggested intervention |
|--|---|
| Unable to blend phonemes orally when an adult sound-talks a word. | Oral blending |
| Unable to blend phonemes orally when the learner sound-talks the word. | |
| Beginning to blend phonemes orally, but is not consistently blending every word. | Blend and find |
| Unable to read words by blending phonemes with Phase 2 graphemes. | Mix it |
| Unable to read words by blending phonemes with Phase 3 graphemes. | |
| Unable to read words with adjacent consonants. | |
| Unable to recognise digraphs & trigraphs when reading words. | Digraph & trigraph spotter |
| Unable to read multi-syllabic words. | Mix it or Digraph & trigraph spotter |
| Unable to read words by blending phonemes with Phase 5 graphemes. | Digraph & trigraph spotter |

| Area of difficulty Common Exception Words (CEW) | Suggested intervention |
|---|---|
| Unable to recognise Phase 2 CEW the to I go no into | Spot it Precision grid |
| Unable to recognise Phase 3 CEW a he she we me be was my you her they all are | |
| Unable to recognise Phase 4 CEW said so do have like some come were there little one when do out what | |
| Unable to recognise Phase 5 CEW oh their people Mr Mrs looked called asked could water where who again thought through work mouse many laughed because different any eyes friends once please | |

11 Conclusion

Remember that the key to undertaking any intervention is to assess the exact learning gap for the child. Once you know where they are struggling, targeted keep-up interventions can help them to make progress quickly.

The Communication Trust has produced a document called Communicating Phonics. This is a guide to support teachers delivering and interpreting the phonics screening check for children with speech, language and communication needs.

This document may be particularly relevant for educators of children undertaking the phonics screening test. However it also provides valuable ideas to support children with a range of SEND needs.

