Chapter 10: Helping At-Risk Beginning Readers

'For children with demonstrated weaknesses in the developmental precursors of reading, intervention may reduce the risk of later failure' (Lonigan, 2006, p. 86).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some broad guidance to teachers wishing to address the reading and reading-related difficulties of beginning readers, several of which may be identified through administering the DTEL-S and DTEL-D.

Teaching Letter Names

As noted in Chapter 9, knowledge of letter names plays a crucial role in the early stages of reading development, not least because many letter names also include clues to the sounds they represent. Ehri and Roberts (2006) provide a number of useful suggestions for teaching letter names, including the following:

- Parents providing informal support through, for example, singing the alphabet song, manipulating magnetic letters, watching TV programmes that feature the alphabet letters, reading alphabet books and storybooks, learning to write personal names, and reading environmental print.
- Learning shapes of letters through handwriting as well as visual recognition. Activities include writing one's name, reading the names of classmates, inventing spellings to label objects, and writing words by listening for letter names in objects (*bee*, *ape*).
- Use of mnemonics to help recall letter names. The mnemonics should link letters to their sounds (e.g., 'Fireman Fred'). Action mnemonics, which are used in programmes such as Jolly Phonics (Lloyd, 1998), are also recommended.

Teaching Phonemic Awareness

As described in Chapter 9, one of the key skills underlying reading development in young children is phonemic awareness. Indeed, several of the DTEL-D tasks assess aspects of phonemic awareness such as Sound Blending, Phonemic Segmentation and Sound Deletion (in initial and final positions in words). This section provides suggestions for working with children who have weaknesses in different aspects of phonemic awareness. First, key findings from Ehri (2001b) (reviewed in Chapter 9) are worth noting:

- While effect sizes of phonemic awareness (PA) training for pre-schoolers are particularly large, other skills (e.g., storybook listening) are also important.
- PA training was more effective when letters were used, than when they were not.
- PA training was more effective when it focused on one or two PA skills (e.g., segmenting words into phonemes, or segmenting and blending phonemes) than on multiple PA skills.

In deciding which aspects of phonemic awareness to emphasise during instruction, it is useful to identify those skills that are likely to develop first, and to leave the more complex skills until later (see Table 41). It might also be noted that some of the more complex phonological awareness skills, such as deleting a phoneme from the end of a word, may not emerge until the child has had some experience with reading.