10-1-1977

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Laveria F. Hutchison
University of Houston

Recommended Citation

Hutchison, L. F. (1977). The Components of a Competency Based Elementary Reading Program. *Reading Horizons, 18* (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol18/iss1/8

THE COMPONENTS OF A COMPETENCY BASED ELEMENTARY READING PROGRAM

Laveria F. Hutchison

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CENTRAL CAMPUS, HOUSTON, TEXAS

Two fourth grade teachers were overheard having the following conversation:

Teacher A: "I'm confused about the concept of a competency based reading program."

Teacher B: "So am I. I don't know what I'm being asked to do. And, what is a module?"

Teacher A: "I don't know what a module is. We really need some help!"

Such conversations are typical among teachers who are trying to develop competency based elementary reading programs. As an aid to such teachers, this article will provide simple explanations that describe the components of this type of teaching strategy.

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The concept of competency based elementary reading instruction

In a competency based reading program, the instructional emphasis is on each student's successful attainment and completion of the specific learning objectives provided. As such, the length of time required for each individual student to complete the objectives may be different. For example, it might take Ronny two weeks to master a set of objectives which took Tina only two days to master.
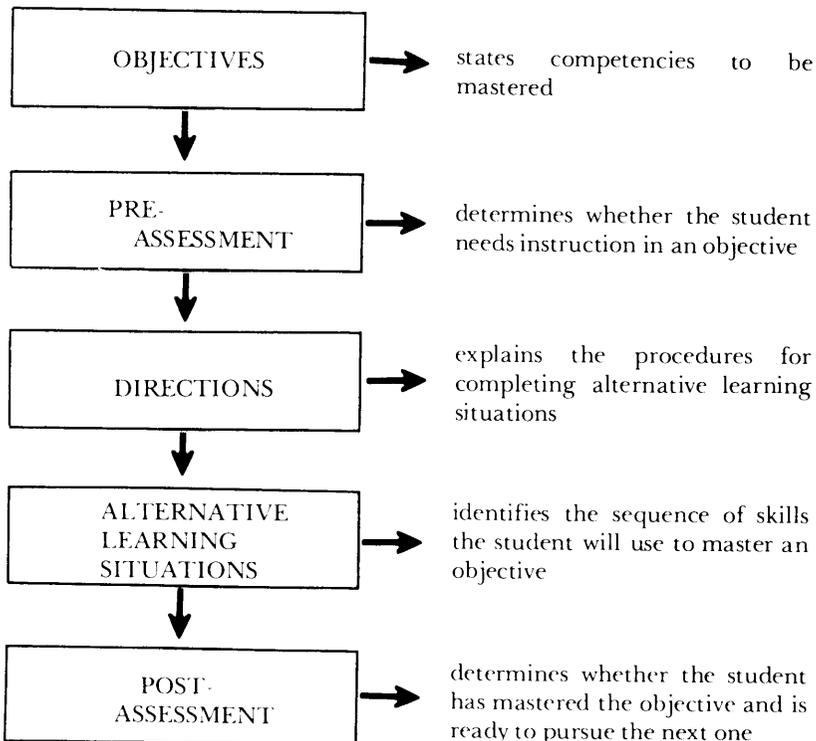
The elements of a learning module

A learning module is a teacher-directed learning plan that incorporates student-directed alternative learning situations (Cooper and Weber, 1973). A module usually contains the following elements: (1) performance objectives; (2) an assessment to be administered before instruction begins (pre-assessment); (3) written and oral directions for completing each alternative learning situation; (4) a list of alternative learning situations; and (5) an assessment to be administered after instruction has been completed (post-assessment). The following definitions explain these components in more detail:

1. *Performance Objectives.* This component states each competency to be mastered.

2. *Pre-assessment.* This component determines whether the student can successfully meet each objective before receiving instruction. Theoretically, if the student can pass the pre-assessment with a competency level of 90%, he has mastered the competency and is ready for the next objective.

3. *Oral and written directions for the module.* This component indicates in descriptive terminology specifically how the alternative learning situations are to be completed by the students. These directions might include such components as when to use paper and pencil, what page to use in the module or in a workbook on a given date of the month, which audio tape to use on a given date, which filmstrip to use on a given date, and what type of grouping situation to expect.

4. *Alternative learning situations.* This component identifies the sequence of skills the student will use to successfully complete the performance objective if he has not passed the pre-assessment. Alternative learning situations should be designed to utilize a personally suitable learning mode (visual, auditory, or tactile-kinesthetic) so that each student can identify his own most appropriate option for mastering each objective.

5. *Post-assessment.* This component indicates whether the student has successfully met the objective. When he has met the objective, he is ready to pursue the next one, but the student not successfully meeting the objective must have additional instruction. The post-assessment may be identical or similar to the pre-assessment.

The following diagram outlines the five components in modular development:

The Components of Modular Development

OBJECTIVES	→	states competencies to be mastered
PRE-ASSESSMENT	→	determines whether the student needs instruction in an objective
DIRECTIONS	→	explains the procedures for completing alternative learning situations
ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SITUATIONS	→	identifies the sequence of skills the student will use to master an objective
POST-ASSESSMENT	→	determines whether the student has mastered the objective and is ready to pursue the next one

Now let's consider what happens during each of the five components of modular development.

Title of Module: *Auditory Discrimination of Beginning Consonant Sounds*
Name of Student: _____
Date: _____

1. Performance objective: Given a stimulus word beginning with *n* or *d*, the student will pair the two words beginning with the same letter sound. (The teacher selects her method of instructional delivery. The preformance objective may be read by the students, may be explained by the teacher, or may be delivered by an instructional substitute, such as a tape recorder or a paraprofessional.)

2. Pre-assessment: Using the set of six words in the following list, say to the student, "You should listen carefully to each set of three words that I pronounce." (Teacher or instructional substitute should pronounce each set of words.) "Which one sounds like _____ at the beginning?" (Teacher or instructional substitute should pronounce the stimulus word.)

NOTE: The criterion for objective mastery should be a competency level of 90% (less than 90% should require the student to complete the module).

pay	rain	nail	Which one sounds like nap at the beginning?
evening	did	corn	Which one sounds like down at the beginning?
nest	map	pot	Which one sounds like nap at the beginning?
send	door	high	Which one sounds like down at the beginning?
spray	work	north	Which one sounds like nap at the beginning?
dance	fly	July	Which one sounds like down at the beginning?

3. *Directions:* The purpose of this task is to teach the learner to auditorily discriminate the *n* and *d* sounds from among at least two other beginning consonant sounds. The teacher must direct the student's attention by stating what is to be learned and by stressing the beginning

sounds in each set of words. The teacher should also explain the procedures for completing the *Alternative Learning Situations.*

4. *Alternative Learning Situations*: The teacher should provide the student with a learning technique for auditorily discriminating the differences among beginning consonant sounds.

Once the skill has been taught effectively, the teacher should provide the student with two or more alternative learning situations. Two examples of alternative learning situations could be to:

1. Provide the student with an auditory listing of these words— full, family, February, five, hole, follow and ask the student to name the word that has a different sound at the beginning.
2. Provide a word for the student, and ask the student to provide a different word that has the same initial consonant sound.

5. *Post-assessment:* Procedure for administration and criterion for objective mastery are the same as for the pre-assessment.

NOTE: Objective mastery of less than 90% should require the student to be re-cycled through the module and should require the student to receive additional skill practice.

new	pour	stop	Which one sounds like never at the beginning?
dip	bathtub	teddy bear	Which one sounds like dig at the beginning?
park	net	hockey	Which one sounds like never at the beginning?
dirt	beach	answer	Which one sounds like dig at the beginning?
needle	market	laugh	Which one sounds like never at the beginning?
golf	question	broom	Which one sounds like dig at the beginning?

You should think of this format as an example for the teacher to use in constructing competency-based reading modular systems for students.

The role of the classroom teacher in a competency based reading program

The teacher should serve as a resource person by being involved on a daily basis both with program development and with individual children, groups of children, and the whole class. The involvement of the teacher with program development includes establishing objectives, and developing assessments and alternative learning situations.

The level of student performance in competency based elementary reading program

The classroom teacher should identify a level of performance for the pre-assessment and post-assessment. Usually a teacher identifies 95% or better as a proficiency level; 85% or less as an incomplete or re-cycle level. Actually these performance levels should be identified by the classroom teacher, because she knows the individual abilities of her students.

The level of performance should become an important component of the teacher's record-keeping file. The teacher should use an evaluation checklist that contains the following information: (1) the pre-assessment and post-assessment performance on each objective for each student; (2) the knowledge skills completed for each objective; (3) the instructional materials utilized by each student for each objective; (4) the descriptive data needed such as the independent, instructional, and frustration reading grade levels' and (5) the skills mastered in reading instructional areas and other related language arts areas.

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Do you remember the conversation at the beginning of this article that summarized the emotions of two fourth grade teachers who are beginning to teach in a competency based elementary reading program? If these two teachers utilize the description of the components of a competency based elementary reading program, their initial developmental strategies will be more effective. These components do work when developing a competency based elementary reading program — try these components soon in your school's reading program.

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