

An Example from the Field

Kelley Evans, reading specialist

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Kelley Evans teaches first grade at Richmond County Elementary School and formerly served as a reading specialist at the middle school level. She uses the Orton Gillingham approach to work with students who struggle with reading and writing, in an attempt to close their reading gap. Though Kelley is not a special education teacher, she often provides specially designed instruction in reading and writing for students with disabilities. Kelley doesn't hesitate to provide intensive instruction to students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) if an IEP team determines that she is the most qualified professional to meet the needs of the student. Learn about Kelley's approach to working with students by viewing her responses to three questions below.

What are some key indicators that assist you in making a match between specific student needs and your method of instructional delivery for reading and writing?

When I was a reading specialist at the middle school level, we assessed every student by using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and the Developmental Spelling Assessment (DSA). We then used the data to create small groups for literacy instruction within the general education classroom. Also, we used the data to determine which students to provide additional instruction to in a pull-out setting. Some students in my groups had disabilities and others did not. I used the Orton Gillingham approach to reading and spelling for all of my small groups and saw significant progress. Because there also tends to be a lot of comprehension issues at the middle school level, in addition, we worked on making connections with text in order to prepare the students to reach mastery on grade-level standards. I also worked closely with general and special education teachers to come up with a plan to meet

student needs. Often, I provided information to special educators on which reading goals were high-quality, and obtainable for certain kids on their caseloads.

This year, I am collaborating with a reading consultant who is incorporating a school-wide, phonics-based approach for beginning readers. I currently use the Orton Gillingham approach to reading and writing instruction during small groups in first grade. I use the Developmental Spelling Assessment (DSA) and an Informal Decoding Inventory. Also, I use the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) to group students, ensuring that I am providing intervention at a level that is most appropriate for each student. I provide phonological awareness instruction during daily, small group stations, which lasts 30-40 minutes per group.

How do you decide which students to target for intensive reading instruction using the Orton Gillingham approach?

This year is my second year implementing the Orton Gillingham approach. I am using the approach with everyone in my first grade class because I experienced how effective it was for middle school students. I can differentiate the use of it based on individualized student levels. It is really neat to incorporate the Orton Gillingham approach with first graders, who are at the beginning stages of learning to read, because now they are able to decode and spell short vowel words even though they haven't yet been taught specific word families for that pattern. They are learning the skills necessary to segment sounds for reading and spelling.

Why do you provide instruction to students who have been identified as having an educational disability when you're not the special educator?

When I was in school for my master's degree, I remember one of my professors saying that most reading disabilities can be addressed through direct instruction by a reading specialist, so it's our job to bridge the reading gap. I want to be the person to do just that. Maybe I am in a stronger position as a general education teacher because I have experience as a reading

specialist. I am able to teach different reading-specific strategies to be able to help solve the achievement gaps. Because my specialty is in reading, I feel like I need extra support in planning for students in math. Collaboration is a necessity in teaching. I think if we have a specific skill set, we, as educators, have an obligation to share our strengths with each other to help make our students successful.